

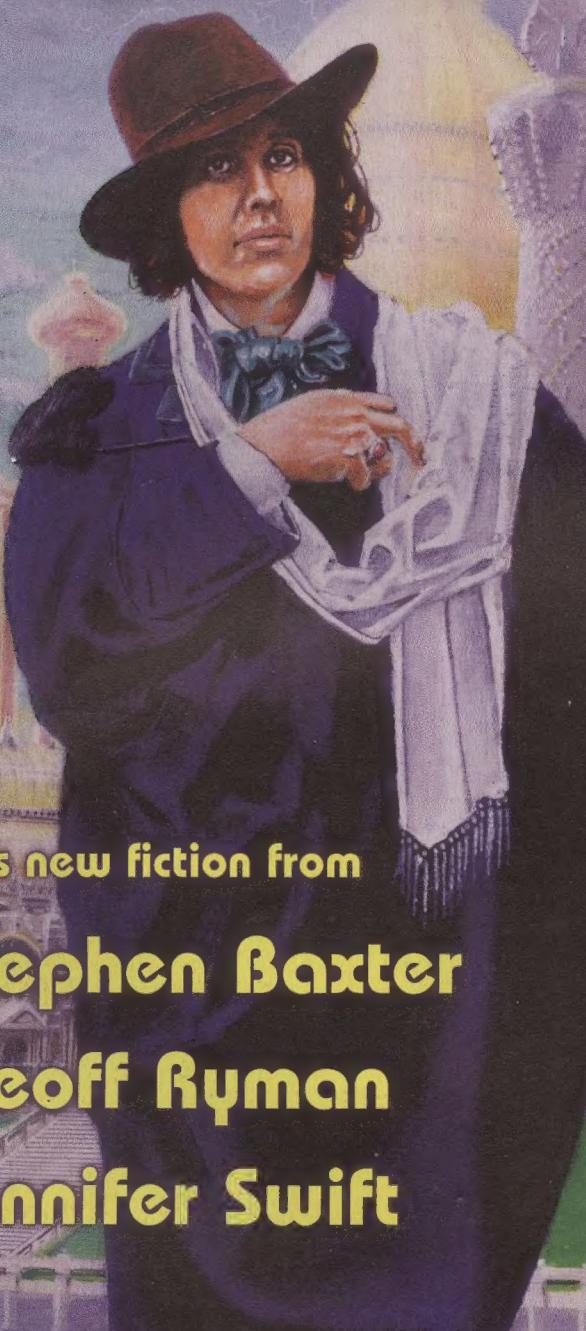
interzone

FEBRUARY 1999

Number 140

£3.00

'The Gateway of Eternity' by Brian Stableford



plus new fiction from

Stephen Baxter

Geoff Ryman

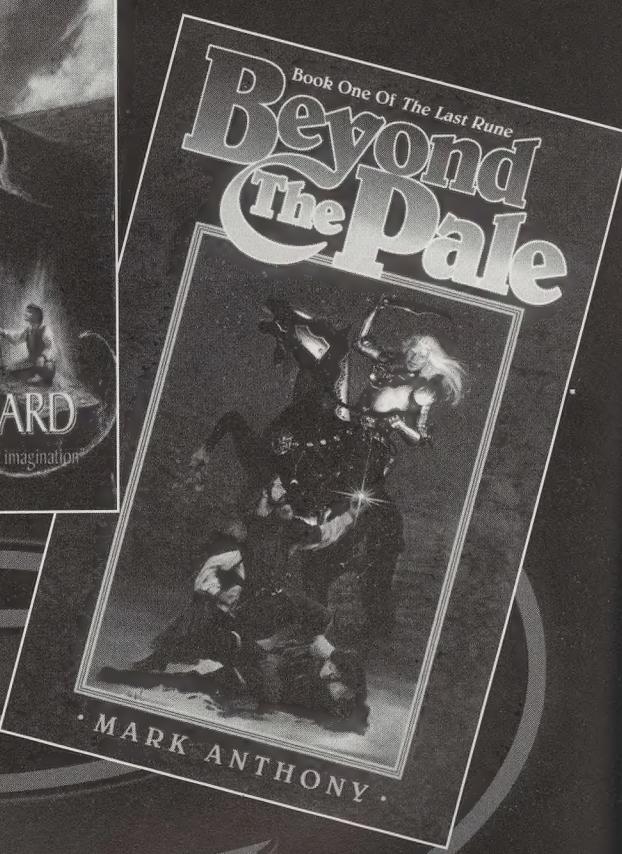
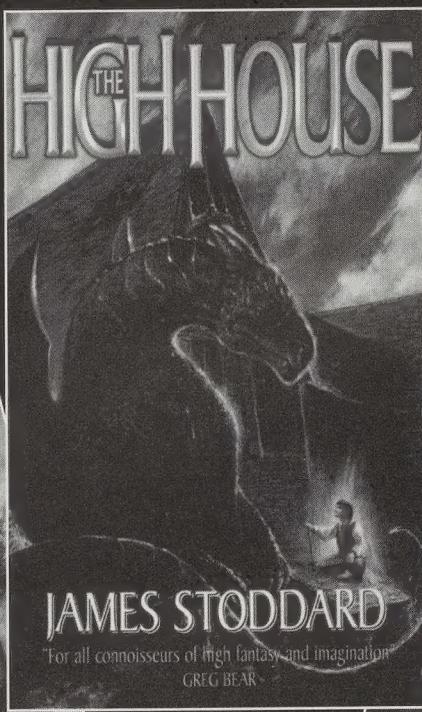
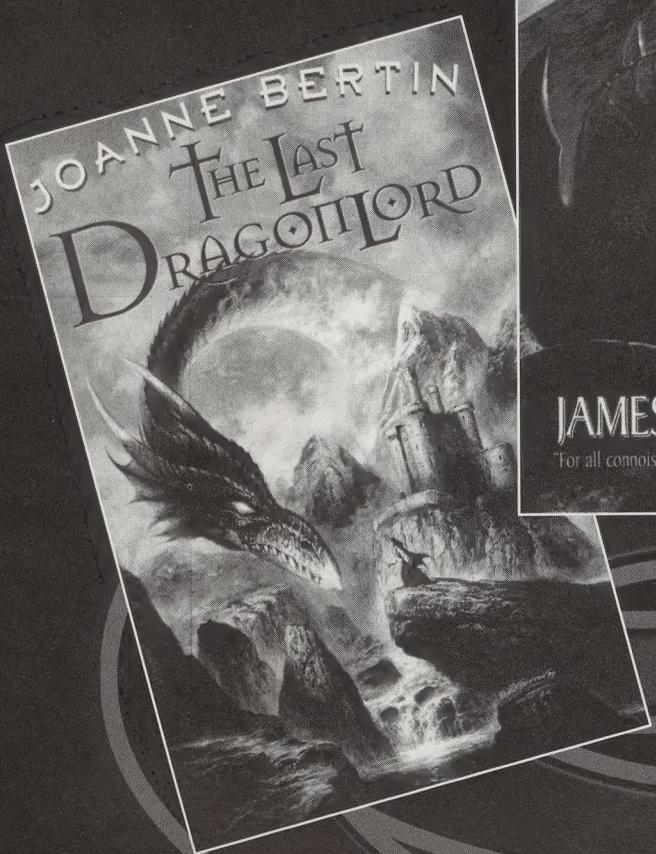
Jennifer Swift

INTERVIEWS WITH STEPHEN BAXTER AND TOM HOLLAND



E A R T H L I G H T

H e r e , N o w , a n d i n t h e F u t u r e

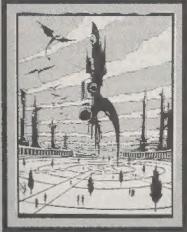


A v a i l a b l e f r o m a l l g o o d b o o k s h o p s



E A R T H L I G H T

<http://www.earthlight.co.uk>



Vignettes by SMS

Editor & Publisher

David Pringle

Deputy Editor

Lee Montgomerie

Assistant Editors

Paul Annis,

Andy Robertson,

Andrew Tidmarsh

Consultant Editor

Simon Ounsley

Advisory Editors

John Clute,

Malcolm Edwards,

Judith Hanna

Graphic Design and Typesetting

Paul Brazier

Subscriptions Secretary

Ann Pringle

Interzone

217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL,

United Kingdom.

All subscriptions, back-issue orders, general correspondence, books for review, and enquiries about advertising should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions:

£32 for one year (12 issues) in the UK.

Cheques or postal orders should be crossed and made payable to *Interzone*.

Overseas subscriptions are £38, payable by International Money Order.

Payments may also be made by MasterCard, Visa or Eurocard: please send your cardholder's name, initials and address written in block letters, with card number, card expiry date and signature. (*Note: overseas payments will be charged at the £ sterling rate.*)

Alternatively, American subscribers may pay by dollar check, drawn on a U.S. bank, at \$60. (All copies to other continents are sent by Air Saver, i.e. accelerated surface mail.).

Lifetime subscriptions:

Lifetime subscriptions: £320 (UK); £380 (overseas); \$600 (USA).

Back-issues

of *Interzone* are available at £3 each in the UK (£3.50 each overseas), postage included.

(US dollar price: \$6 Air Saver.)

All issues are in print *except* numbers

1-2, 4-13, 15-24, 31, 33, 37, 51 & 60.

Order them from the address above.

Submissions:

stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range, should be sent singly and each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage.

No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. Submissions should be sent to the Brighton address above.

interzone

science fiction & fantasy

FEBRUARY 1999

Number 140

CONTENTS

Fiction

ELSEWHERE

Geoff Ryman

6

THE PLAIN OF BONES

Stephen Baxter

15

LIVING HISTORY

Jennifer Swift

23

THE GATEWAY OF ETERNITY, part two

Brian Stableford

Illustrations by SMS

34

Features

INTERACTION

Readers' Letters

4

THE PULL ON YOUR INNER EAR

Stephen Baxter

interviewed by Stan Nicholls

10

VAMPIRES, SAND & HORSES

Tom Holland

interviewed by David Mathew

19

ANSIBLE LINK

David Langford

22

JANEWAYS AND THANEWAYS:

The Better Half, and Worse Half, of Science-Fiction Television

Gary Westfahl

31

BOOK REVIEWS

Tom Arden, Paul McAuley, Chris Gilmore

and David Mathew

54

Cover by SMS for "The Gateway of Eternity"

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 1999, on behalf of the various contributors

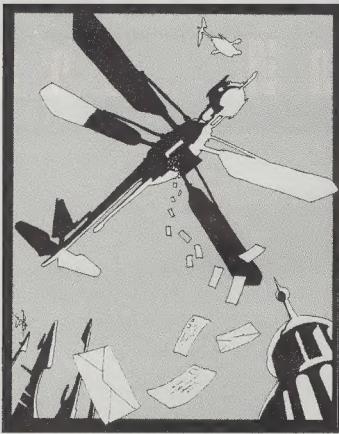
ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution: Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd., Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye, East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

Bookshop distribution: Central Books, 99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 0181 986 4854).

INTERACTION



ON BALLARD AND LUCKHURST

Dear Editors:

The urge to stand up in defence of my friend and colleague Roger Luckhurst is too strong to resist. His *The Angle Between Two Walls* is a highly intelligent and powerfully argued attempt to read Ballard via contemporary theory – it is a work of academic criticism, not a fan-encomium. But Ballard fans, it seems, are an exceptionally touchy bunch, aggressively disinclined to read anything other than straightforward praise of their hero. To call Luckhurst “ignorant, squeamish [and] ridiculous” is extraordinary – not so much because of the libellous misrepresentation (because I know him I can vouch that, amongst my many academic acquaintanceships, he is the one least meriting such description), but more because that sheer vitriol suggests that a raw nerve has been touched somewhere. Even your editorial gloss on Lt. Col. Polz’s letter (*Interzone* 137) couldn’t resist a certain smideness: as if Luckhurst wrote in a deliberately obscure academic style in order to “exclude all laypersons.” A professional idiom is not the same thing as a “jargon”; you wouldn’t expect an academic study in the field of chemistry, or psychology, or music to be written in the style of *The Cat in the Hat*. I have read some pretty impenetrable academic literary studies in my time, and Luckhurst’s book – where all his “jargon” terms are carefully defined, and the terms of the debate in which he is engaging are lucidly set out – is not one.

Indeed, speaking personally I read *The Angle Between Two Walls* with great pleasure, and I found it unusually insightful. It enhanced and deepened my appreciation of Ballard, and of aspects of the critical debate on science fiction in general, particularly the intriguing borderline sf so often inhabits between the Popular and the

Avant-Garde – something surely central to Ballard. The absurd venom with which this study has been sometimes greeted (in the letter pages of *Interzone*, and elsewhere) seems to me an index of insecurity, the snarling of those unwilling to surrender what they see as *their* Ballard. It’s hard to resist the urge to say: Grow Up. Sf is poorly served by academic criticism at the moment, and if notable and valiant exercises like Luckhurst’s are greeted with such howls and excoriations then the situation isn’t going to improve – and then instead of being taken seriously as a discipline of letters, sf will continue to be looked down on as a literary poor relation.

Adam Roberts

Royal Holloway, University of London

Dear Editors:

I think that Roger Luckhurst book about Ballard sounds nonsensical, too (“Interaction,” *IIZ* 137), and I honestly don’t think you’re right – over-the-top criticism consigned George Meredith to virtual obscurity with most of his finest books still out of print. People react to that, just as they react to fashion. It’s inclined to drive off the potential readership – people like me, say, when I first read “The Drowned World” in *Science Fantasy* and knew that this bloke was the business – pressing Ted Carnell to publish “The Terminal Beach,” telling him it would make his reputation – Barry Bayley, too. But had I read that book before I’d read any Ballard, I’d probably never have got around to reading anything by him.

Sf has become good territory for minor academics looking for a niche – where it’s ruled by increasingly abstract ideas and second-rate books are over-examined by third-rate scholars who’ve learned a nonsense language and believe it gives them control over something. Real English usually does the trick. You just have to know how to use it...

Anyway, most of Ballard’s contribution can be summed up very easily. He can be an awful, clunky writer and his writing is not at all poetic – but he thinks in terms of poetic narrative – visual narrative – and he thinks very well in those terms. He is a storyteller first and foremost. Again, all *New Worlds* was ever looking for was appropriate forms of narrative. But we were up against people who thought “narrative” was one thing, as set and familiar as Japanese *No*. Not so bad now, thank goodness.

But the jabber of third-rate post-modernists against the jabber of ageing Leavisites isn’t a pretty sound. And it’s meaningless to apply either

criteria to the likes of Ballard. All the bugger ever wanted to do was tell a story. Which he’s been trying to tell ever since, sometimes with genius. Almost always with success.

Mike Moorcock

Bastrop, Texas

GILMORE ON TSR

Dear Editors:

I thoroughly enjoyed Chris Gilmore’s review of Elaine Cunningham’s *Ever-meet: Island of Elves* in no. 137, as aside from anything else it was a rare but fine example of a reviewer with standards colliding with a piece of pure spinoffery and treating it as a Real Book. Explaining some background runs the risk of losing the effect, but Chris might be interested...

TSR, the publishers of that book, are not only a subsidiary of Wizards of the Coast, but are a gaming company of long standing themselves. Indeed, they were and are the publishers of “Dungeons and Dragons” in all its variations. They were recently bought out by WotC following financial difficulties, which were rumoured to have largely been the result of problems with their fiction publishing line (something to do with container-loads of returns coming in from the US bookshop trade). More to the point, the “Forgotten Realms,” on whose trademarking Chris remarks, is a game-world of TSR’s creation, the setting for scads of D&D game material as well as novels. The trademarking of the epithet is therefore reasonable enough, it its way. (And the setting is the subject of more maps and chronologies than Chris would want to know about.)

As to whether TSR should be charged royalties by the Tolkien estate for the use of the word “orc” – the answer turns out to be “no,” and believe me, the subject has been investigated, by lawyers. That particular noun turns out to pre-date JRRT by quite a long time (although it must be said that the orcs of fantasy games owe more to his work than to any previous mythical bearer of the name). “Hobbit,” on the other hand, is (almost certainly) Tolkien’s own coinage, which is why, when D&D first grew big enough to be noticed, countless short and hairy-footed characters suddenly found themselves re-labelled “halflings.”

All of which is far too boring and easy, really, but before we conclude that reviewers of tender sensitivities should be kept away from fiction published by games companies – well, we should be careful of stereotyping. The other such company with a large fiction line is White Wolf – who are responsible for the most recent incarnation of *New Worlds*, a lot of reprint-

ing of Mike Moorcock's stuff, and several other books that really did deserve to exist. Heck, even TSR have been known to put out moderately well-liked (non-spinoff) novels on their good days.

Phil Masters

Home Page: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Phil_Masters

POINTS FOR WESTFAHL

Dear Editors:

In "Did Alien Astronauts Make the Shroud of Turin?" (IZ 136), Gary Westfahl missed one of the most obvious arguments against the theory that humans became intelligent through alien intervention: infinite regression. My grandmother once told me that as a child, she shocked her grandfather, who was a rabbi, by asking "Then who created God?" In the same way, who gave the aliens intelligence? Saying that sentient beings from another planet gave any species the knowledge and impetus required for its intellectual development just pushes the question of the origin of intelligence back one remove. Who gave the first intelligent species its intelligence? It is much more logical, comprehensive and satisfactory to assume that any sentient species develops intelligence (generally defined as including self-consciousness, language and the use of tools) in the course of its evolution within its planet's biosystem over a long period, although some could, of course, still be influenced by aliens.

Ruth Ludlam

Israel

Dear Editors:

With reference to Gary Westfahl's problems over the "correct" pronouns to use with singular nouns and pronouns. The 2nd edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the use of "their" from the 14th century. "Often used in relation to a singular noun or pronoun denoting a person... Also so used instead of 'his or her,' when the gender is inclusive or uncertain." The *OED* also notes the similar use of "they" (from 1526) and "them" (from 1742). Among the authors cited are: Richardson (*Pamela*), Fielding (*Tom Jones*), Goldsmith, Thackeray (*Vanity Fair*), Bagehot, Ruskin and George Bernard Shaw.

Disappointingly, however, no quotes from either Jane Austen or Shakespeare. And, sadly, none from the far side of the pond. It may be of interest to you (and Gary Westfahl) to know that in one language at least, Finnish, there is only one 3rd person singular pronoun - *hän*. Were the English language to adopt this pronoun to replace he and she, not only would it solve at a stroke all PC problems, it would also

make life a great deal easier for the poor Finns. Currently they have terrible troubles when learning English, trying to remember to make that silly distinction between he and she.

John Nixon

Sundsvall, Sweden

Dear Editors:

A footnote to your reply to Gary Westfahl's letter, *Interzone* 137, is that E. Nesbit, when referring to one member of a mixed-sex group of children, regularly used the pronoun "it."

David Langford

Reading, Berks.

ansible@cix.co.uk

<http://www.ansible.demon.co.uk/>

FROM A NEWER READER...

Dear Editors:

I've only been reading *Interzone* since issue 130, but I've enjoyed every issue immensely.

It seems to me that the ongoing debate about Alternative Histories is less about the merits of the whole genre than of one particular book - *Anno Dracula* by Kim Newman. Personally, I would question whether *Anno Dracula* is even AH to start with, at least in the same sense as, say, *Pavane*. I reckon there is a good argument that Newman's novel is actually "recursive fiction." It seems odd to have to point this out, but some readers seem to have forgotten that vampires are mythical creatures, and thus it can hardly be argued that *Anno Dracula* is a "serious" piece of speculation. It is, rather, a bit of a literary game, some fun within a horribly puffed-up genre - perhaps even a bit of a joke, albeit a very well-told and entertaining one. As the product of a minor public school, I was fed a diet of Kipling, Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard, and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing Newman affectionately spoof them - much as John Duder enjoyed the Vietnam storyline of "Teddy Bear's Picnic" (an admission which surely undermines his own argument?). Ultimately, just as I don't want to watch *Solaris* every time I go to the cinema, I don't want to read *The Atrocity Exhibition* every time I pick up a paperback. Surely there's still a place for unpretentious entertainment?

I would contend that AH is an intrinsic part of sf... Everybody plays the "what if" game, and it would be a pretty poor form of speculative fiction which didn't play that game too. The merits of individual books must be considered individually - but books should not be criticized for not being something they never claimed to be, or for the fact they don't carry the woes of the world on their shoulders.

In response to your request for feed-

back in *Interaction*, issue 135, I would be extremely interested in good anthologies of either European or World sf, whether contemporary or historical. I'm completely unfamiliar with the anthologies mentioned on the letters page, and my knowledge of non-English-language sf is pretty much limited to *We*, *Solaris* and *Kafka*.

Although I've seen *Stalker*, I've never been able to get hold of any of the Strugatsky Brothers' work, for example.

Anyway, I would love to see more non-English-language sf in *IZ*. In particular, given the quality of the upper-end manga and anime, and given the overwhelming presence of Japan in so much modern sf, I'd like to see what some of Japan's indigenous sf writers are up to. I don't hold with a lot of the knee-jerk Yank-bashing that seems to go on in critical circles at the moment (I suspect much of it is a reaction to the knee-jerk Red-bashing the US encouraged during the Cold War), but I do think it would be a great pity for a substantial body of work to go unknown simply because the publishing market is geared so heavily to the English language and the US market. And if *Interzone* doesn't publish this work, who will?

Sefton Disney
Taunton, Somerset

Clarion West Writers Workshop

For writers preparing for professional careers in science fiction and fantasy

June 20 - July 30, 1999

NANCY KRESS
OCTAVIA BUTLER
GREG BEAR
HOWARD WALDROP
GORDON VAN GELDER
GWYNETH JONES
Instructors

Deadline for applications is April 1, 1999. Write or call for information.

\$100 tuition reduction for applications received by March 1, 1999. Women and minorities encouraged to apply.

Limited scholarships available.

Clarion West · Suite 350 · 340 15th Ave. East
Seattle, Washington 98112 · (206) 322-9083

EVERYONE

When we knew Granddad was going to die, we took him to see the Angel of the North.

When he got there, he said: It's all different. There were none of these oaks all around it then, he said. Look at the size of them! The last time I saw this, he says to me, I was no older than you are now, and it was brand new, and we couldn't make out if we liked it or not.

We took him, the whole lot of us, on the tram from Blaydon. We made a day of it. All of Dad's exes and their exes and some of their kids and me Aunties and their exes and their kids. It wasn't that happy a group to tell you the truth. But Granddad loved seeing us all in one place.

He was going a bit soft by then. He couldn't tell what the time was any more and his words came out wrong. The Mums made us sit on his lap. He kept calling me by my Dad's name. His breath smelt funny but I didn't mind, not too much. He told me about how things used to be in Blaydon.

They used to have a gang in the Dene called Pedro's Gang. They drank something called Woodpecker and broke people's windows and they left empty tins of pop in the woods. If you were little you weren't allowed out cos everyone's Mum was so fearful and all. Granddad once saw twelve young lads go over and hit an old woman and take her things. One night his brother got drunk and put his fist through a window, and he went to the hospital, and he had to wait hours before they saw him and that was terrible.

I thought it sounded exciting meself. But I didn't say so because Granddad wanted me to know how much better things are now.

He says to me, like: the trouble was, Landlubber, we were just kids, but we all thought the future would be terrible. We all thought the world was going to burn up, and that everyone would get poorer and poorer, and the crime worse.

He told me that lots of people had no work. I don't really understand how anyone could have nothing to do. But then I've never got me head around what money used to be either.

Or why they built that Angel. It's not even that big,

and it was old and covered in rust. It didn't look like an Angel to me at all, the wings were so big and square. Granddad said, no, it looks like an airplane, that's what airplanes looked like back then. It's meant to go rusty, it's the Industrial Spirit of the North.

I didn't know what he was on about. I asked Dad why the Angel was so important and he kept explaining it had a soul, but couldn't say how. The church choir showed up and started singing hymns. Then it started to rain. It was a wonderful day out.

I went back into the tram and asked me watch about the Angel.

This is my watch, here, see? It's dead good isn't it, it's got all sorts on it. It takes photographs and all. Here, look, this is the picture it took of Granddad by the Angel. It's the last picture I got of him. You can talk to people on it. And it keeps thinking of fun things for you to do.

Why not explain to the interviewer why the Angel of the North is important?

Duh. Usually they're fun.

Take the train to Newcastle and walk along the river until you see on the hill where people keep their homing pigeons. Muck out the cages for readies.

It's useful when you're a bit short, it comes up with ideas to make some dosh.

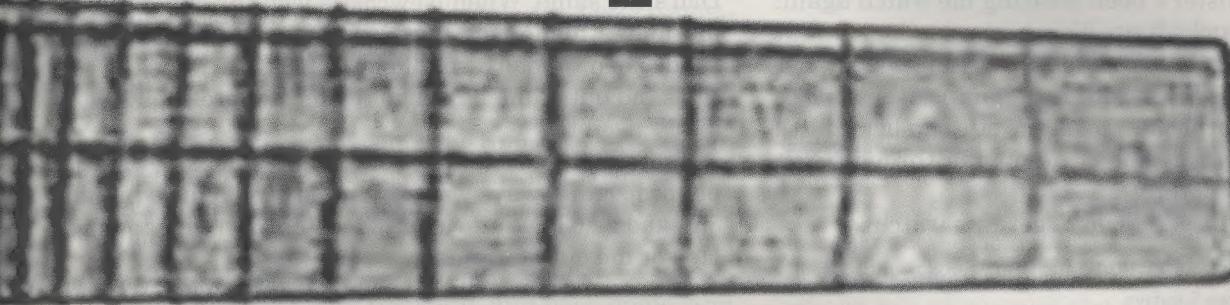
It's really clever. It takes all the stuff that goes on around here and stirs it around and comes up with something new. Here, listen:

The laws of evolution have been applied to fun. New generations of ideas are generated and eliminated at such a speed that evolution works in real time. It's survival of the funnest and you decide.

They evolve machines too. Have you seen our new little airplanes? They've run the designs through thousands of generations, and they got better and faster and smarter.

The vicar bought the whole church choir airplanes

Everywhere



Geoff
Ryman

they can wear. The wings are really good, they look just like bird's wings with pinions sticking out like this. Oh! I really want one of them. You can turn somersaults in them. People build them in their sheds for spare readies, I could get one now if I had the dosh.

Every Sunday as long as it isn't raining, you can see the church choir take off in formation. Little old ladies in leotards and blue jeans and these big embroidered Mexican hats. They rev up and take off and start to sing the Muslim call to prayer. They echo all over the show. Then they cut their engines and spiral up on the updraft. That's when they start up on Nearer My God to Thee.

Every Sunday, Granddad and I used to walk up Shotton Road to the Dene. It's so high up there that we could look down on down on top of them. He never got over it. Once he laughed so hard he fell down, and just lay there on the grass. We just lay on our backs and looked up at the choir, they just kept going up like they were kites.

When the Travellers come to Blaydon, they join in. Their wagons are pulled by horses and have calliopes built into the front, so on Sundays, when the choir goes up, the calliopes start up, so you got organ music all over the show as well. Me Dad calls Blaydon a sound sandwich. He says it's all the hills.

The Travellers like our acoustics, so they come here a lot. They got all sorts to trade. They got these bacteria that eat rubbish, and they hatch new machines, like smart door keys that only work for the right people. They make their own beer, but you got to be a bit careful how much you drink.

Granddad and I used to take some sarnies and our sleeping bags and kip with them. The Travellers go everywhere, so they sit around the fire and tell about all sorts going on, not just in England but France and Italia. One girl, her Mum let her go with them for a whole summer. She went to Prague and saw all these Buddhist monks from Thailand. They were Travellers and all.

Granddad used to tell the Travellers his stories too. When he was young he went to Mexico. India. The lot. You could in them days. He even went to Egypt, my

Granddad. He used to tell the Travellers the same stories, over and over, but they never seemed to notice. Like, when he was in Egypt he tried to rent this boat to take him onto the Delta, and he couldn't figure why it was so expensive, and when he got on it, he found he'd rented a car ferry all to himself by mistake. He had the whole thing to himself. The noise of the engines scared off the birds which was the only reason he'd wanted the boat.

So, Granddad was something of a Traveller himself. He went everywhere.

There's all sorts to do around Blaydon. We got dolphins in the municipal swimming pool.

We dug it ourselves, in the Haughs just down there by the river. It's tidal, our river. Did you know? It had dolphins anyway, but our pool lured them in. They like the people and the facilities, like the video conferencing. They like video conferencing, do dolphins. They like being fed and all.

My Dad and I help make the food. We grind up fish heads on a Saturday at Safeways. It smells rotten to me, but then I'm not an aquatic mammal, am I? That's how we earned the readies to buy me my watch. You get everyone along grinding fish heads, everybody takes turns. Then you get to go to the swimming.

Sick people get first crack at swimming with the dolphins. When Granddad was sick, he'd take me with him. There'd be all this steam coming off the water like in a vampire movie. The dolphins always knew who wasn't right, what was wrong with them. Mrs Grathby had trouble with her joints, they always used to be gentle with her, just nudge her along with their noses like. But Granddad, there was one he called Liam. Liam always used to jump up and land real hard right next to him, splash him all over and Granddad would push him away, laughing like, you know? He loved Liam. They were pals.

Have a major water-fight on all floors of the Grand Hotel in Newcastle.

Hear that? It just keeps doing that until something takes your fancy.

Hire Dad the giant bunny rabbit costume again and make him wear it.

We did that once before. It was dead fun. I think it knows Dad's a bit down since Granddad.

Call your friend Heidi and ask her to swap clothes with you and pretend to be each other for a day.

Aw Jeez! Me sister's been wearing me watch again! It's not fair! It mucks it up, it's supposed to know what I like, not her and that flipping Heidi. And she's got her own computer, it's loads better than mine, it looks like a shirt and has earphones, so no one else can hear it. It's not fair! People just come clod-hopping through. You don't get to keep nothing.

Look this is all I had to do to get this watch!

Grind fishfood on 3.11, 16.11, 20.12 and every Sunday until 3.3

Clean pavements three Sundays

Deliver four sweaters for Step Mum

Help Dad with joinery for telecoms outstation

Wire up Mrs Grathby for video immersion

Attend school from April 10th to 31 July inclusive

I did even more than that. At least I got some over. I'm saving up for a pair of cars.

Me and me mates love using the cars. I borrow me Dad's pair. You wear them like shoes and they're smart. It's great fun on a Sunday. We all go whizzin down Lucy Street together, which is this great big hill, but the shoes won't let you go too fast or crash into anything. We all meet up, whizz around in the mall in great big serpent. You can pre-program all the cars together, so you all break up and then all at once come back together, to make shapes and all.

Granddad loved those cars. He hated his stick, so he'd go shooting off in my Dad's pair, ducking and weaving, and shouting back to me, Come on, Landlubber, keep up! I was a bit scared in them days, but he kept up at me til I joined in. He'd get into those long lines, and we shoot off the end of them, both of us. He'd hold me up.

He helped me make me lantern and all. Have you seen our lanterns, all along the mall? They look good when the phosphors go on at night. All the faces on them are real people, you know. You know the ink on them's made of these tiny chips with legs? Dad's seen them through a microscope, he says they look like synchronized swimmers.

I got one with my face on it. I was bit younger then so I have this really naff crew cut. Granddad helped me make it. It tells jokes. I'm not very good at making jokes up, but Granddad had this old joke book. At least I made the effort.

Let's see, what else. There's loads around here. We got the sandbox in front of the old mall. Everybody has a go at that, making things. When King William died all his fans in wheelchairs patted together a picture of him in sand. Then it rained. But it was a good picture.

Our sandbox is a bit different. It's got mostly real sand. There's only one corner of it computer dust. It's all right for kids and that or people who don't want to do things themselves. I mean when we were little we had

the dust make this great big 3D sign Happy Birthday Granddad Piper. He thought it was wonderful because if you were his age and grew up with PCs and that, it must be wonderful, just to think of something and have it made.

I don't like pictures, they're too easy. Me, I like to get stuck in. If I go to the sandbox to make something, I want to come back with sand under me fingernails. Me Dad's the same. When Newcastle won the cup, me and me mates made this big Newcastle crest out of real sand. Then we had a sandfight. It took me a week to get the sand out of me hair. I got loads of mates now, but I didn't used to.

Granddad was me mate for a while. I guess I was his pet project. I always was a bit quiet, and a little bit left out, and also I got into a bit of trouble from time to time. He got me out of myself.

You know I was telling you about the Angel? When I went back into that tram I sat and listened to the rain on the roof. It was dead quiet and there was nobody around, so I could be meself. So I asked me watch. OK then. What is this Angel? And it told me the story of how the Angel of the North got a soul.

There was this prisoner in Hull jail for thieving cos he run out of readies cos he never did nothing. It was all his fault really, he says so himself. He drank and cheated his friends and all that and did nothing with all his education.

He just sat alone in his cell. First off, he was angry at the police for catching him, and then he was angry with himself for getting caught and doing it and all of that. Sounds lovely, doesn't he? Depressing isn't the word.

Then he got this idea, to give the Angel a soul.

It goes like this. There are 11 dimensions, but we only see three of them and time, and the others are what was left over after the Big Bang. They're too small to see but they're everywhere at the same time, and we live in them too, but we don't know it. There's no time there, so once something happens, it's like a photograph, you can't change it.

So what the prisoner of Hull said that means is that everything we do gets laid down in the other dimensions like train tracks. It's like a story, and it doesn't end until we die, and that does the job for us. That's our soul, that story.

So what the Prisoner in Hull does, is work in the prison, get some readies and pay to have a client put inside the Angel's head.

And all the other computers that keep track of everyone's jobs or the questions they asked, or just what they're doing, that all gets uploaded to the Angel.

Blaydon's there. It's got all of us, grinding fish heads. Every time someone makes tea or gets married from Carlisle to Ulverton from Newcastle to Derby, that gets run through the Angel. And that Angel is laying down the story of the North.

My watch told me that, sitting in that tram.

Then everyone else starts coming back in, but not Dad and Granddad, so I go out to fetch them.

The clouds were all pulled down in shreds. It looked like the cotton candy Dad makes at fêtes. The sky was

full of the church choir in their little airplanes. For just a second, it looked like a Mother Angel, with all her little ones.

I found Dad standing alone with Granddad. I thought it was rain on my Dad's face, but it wasn't. He was looking at Granddad, all bent and twisted, facing into the wind.

We got to go Dad, I said.

And he said, In a minute son. Granddad was looking up at the planes and smiling.

And I said it's raining Dad. But they weren't going to come in. So I looked at the Angel and all this rust running off it in red streaks onto the concrete. So I asked, if it's an Angel of the North, then why is it facing south?

And Granddad says, Because it's holding out its arms in welcome.

He didn't want to go.

We got him back into the tram, and back home, and he started to wheeze a bit, so me Step Mum put him to bed and about eight o'clock she goes in to swab his teeth with vanilla, and she comes out and says to Dad, I think he's stopped breathing.

So I go in, and I can see, no he's still breathing. I can hear it. And his tongue flicks, like he's trying to say something. But Dad comes in, and they all start to cry and carry on. And the neighbours all come in, yah, yah, yah, and I keep saying, it's not true, look, he's still breathing. What do they have to come into it for, it's not their Granddad, is it?

No one was paying any attention to the likes of me, were they? So I just take off. There's this old bridge you're not allowed on. It's got trees growing out of it. The floor's gone, and you have to walk along the top of the barricades. You fall off, you go straight into the river, but it's a good dodge into Newcastle.

So I just went and stood there for a bit, looking down on the river. Me Granddad used to take me sailing. We'd push off from the Haughs, and shoot out under this bridge, I could see where we were practically. And we'd go all the way down the Tyne and out to sea. He used to take me out to where the dolphins were. You'd see Liam come up. He was still wearing his computer, Liam, like a crown.

So I'm standing on the bridge, and me watch says: go down to the swimming pool, and go and tell Liam that Granddad's dead.

It's a bit like a dog I guess. You got to show one dog the dead body of the other or it will pine.

So I went down to the pool, but it's late and raining and there's nobody there, and I start to call him, like: Liam! Li-am! But he wasn't there.

So me watch says: he's wearing his computer: give him a call on his mobile.

So me watch goes bleep bleep bleep, and there's a crackle and suddenly I hear a whoosh and crinkle, and there's all these cold green waves on the face of my watch, and I say Liam? Liam, this is me, remember me, Liam? My Granddad's dead Liam. I thought you might need to know.

But what is he, just a dolphin right, I don't know what it meant. How's he supposed to know who I am. You all

right then, Liam? Catching lots of fish are you? So I hung up.

And I stand there, and the rain's really bucketing down, and I don't want to go home. Talking to yourself. It's the first sign, you know.

And suddenly me watch starts up again, and it's talking to me with Granddad's voice. You wanna hear what it said? Here. Hear.

Hello there, Landlubber. How are ya? This is your old Granddad. It's a dead clever world we live in, isn't it? They've rigged this thing up here, so that I can put this in your watch for when you need it.

Listen, me old son. You mustn't grieve, you know. Things are different now. They know how it works. We used to think we had a little man in our heads who watched everything on a screen and when you died he went to heaven not you. Now, they know, there's no little man, there's no screen. There's just a brain putting everything together. And what we do is ask ourselves: what do we think about next? What do we do next?

You know all about those dimension things, don't you? Well I got a name for them. I call them Everywhere. Cos they are. And I want you to know, that I'm Everywhere now.

That's how we live forever in heaven these days. And it's true, me old son. You think of me still travelling around Mexico before I met your Mamby. Think of me in India. Think of me learning all about readies to keep up with you lot. Think of me on me boat, sailing out to sea. Remember that day I took you sailing out beyond the Tyne mouth? It's still there, Landlubber.

You know, all the evil in the world, all the sadness comes from not having a good answer to that question: what do I do next? You just keep thinking of good things to do, lad. You'll be all right. We'll all be all right. I wanted you to know that.

I got me footie on Saturdays, Granddad. Then I'm thinking I'll start up school again. They got a sailing club now. I thought I'd join it, Granddad, thought I'd take them out to where you showed me the dolphins. I'll tell them about Everywhere.

Did you know, Granddad?

They're making a new kind of watch. It's going to show us Everywhere, too.

Copyright © Geoff Ryman, 1999

This story was commissioned by Artists Agency for the *Visions of Utopia* project, which brought together artists and communities throughout the North of England to consider visions of the future. It is published here for the first time.

Geoff Ryman's previous stories in *Interzone*, fairly infrequent but all of them distinguished, were "The Unconquered Country" (issue 7), "Love Sickness" (issues 20-21), "Fan" (issue 81), "Dead Space for the Unexpected" (issue 88), "Home" (issue 93), "Warmth" (issue 100) and "Family" (issue 127). He lives in London and works for the Civil Service.

THE PULL ON YOUR INNER EAR

Stephen Baxter

interviewed by Stan Nicholls

"MOONSEED IS REALLY A CONTEMPORARY NOVEL OF politics and finance," Stephen Baxter says. "It's as much a disaster thriller as it is science fiction, and it has a relatively simple plot compared to some of my other books. I've always loved disaster stories, particularly the big-scale ones in movies like *Earthquake* and *When Worlds Collide*, and I felt like doing a straightforward events-driven novel with characters struggling to cope with a global threat."

The book involves a trip to the moon, a rather unfashionable subject in sf of late. But Baxter feels that the public's long-standing apathy about space exploration just might be changing. "Look at the adventures of Pathfinder, for instance, the probe that went to Mars with its brave little rover. I thought the public reaction to that was very interesting, and NASA hammed it up for all they were worth. It was completely anthropomorphic, but it *worked* and we were all glued to our TV sets. People sympathized in a strange way with that rover. So I'm sure that if they put a human on Mars it would be the same. But whether there's any real investment there, apart from emotional investment, I'm not sure. Because even since the success of Pathfinder, last year, the funding in America has been cut for the follow-up unmanned missions, and there's been no real protest from the public. So NASA hasn't been able to get the support to keep money there." He suspects the present somewhat moribund state of space exploration has its origins in the Apollo missions. "Apollo was a wonderful expedition, but it's a shame in a way that it was quite so expensive and over quite so quickly. The technically logical next step was to go on to Mars, but there was no political follow-on or even scientific follow-on."

Baxter agrees that the problem centres on there no longer being a Cold War to give impetus to the space programme. "That's what I speculated about in *Titan*, where I imagine a new cold war between China and America. The Chinese are actually planning to put a man or a woman in orbit before the end of the century. They've got rockets which are about the same standard as the early Soviet boosters, so they could do it. It wouldn't be the space shuttle, it would be something like the Russian Soyuz. Conceivably, if the right kind of rivalry kicks off

between America and China, you could see the Americans go back into action. But that's the wrong reason to do it, isn't it?" The most likely long-term solution, he believes, could be financial logic. "There are more space launches every year for economic reasons; communications satellites mostly. Like this amazing Iridium network, with its hundreds of micro-satellites. So there is a lot of space activity but it's commercial and not very glamorous. But as soon as we break out, as launch costs come down and somebody makes a good economic case for doing something like going to an asteroid, then I think it would happen. But it may be slow and painful from our point of view. We were spoiled by Apollo. It meant a lot to me. I was eleven when they landed, so it's been my whole life really. I've still got some of the literature I kept from those days. There were going to be space stations, and bases on the moon by 1980. Bases on Mars by 1990. It was all going to be fantastic. But it was never real, you know? The funding for Apollo was starting to be cut in 1966, three years before the moon landing. It was purely political. That's the trouble with artificial goals. They can get you going, they can get you funding, but as soon as they're achieved everything goes away."

When we do get into exploring space it seems probable we're going to encounter more habitats like the moon than planets resembling Earth. Doesn't that make colonizing the moon, and using it as a kind of test bed, a sensible option? "I think you're absolutely right. Buzz Aldrin says this, and he's a guy who's *been* there, and written science fiction. There's probably only one planet uniquely like Earth, but surely the universe is going to be full of rocky little worlds like the moon. So if you can learn to live there, you can live anywhere. I think there's something strange about the moon, and it's partly what I was trying to get to in *Moonseed*. We take it for granted, but if the moon wasn't there and it appeared in our skies tomorrow, if Mercury was dragged up from the centre of the solar system and dumped into orbit by some alien force, it would be the story of the century, wouldn't it? But because it's just *up there* we're somehow used to it and it doesn't seem



Photograph: Jerry Mason

like a real world. That was another way in which the Apollo experience wasn't helpful. It didn't give us a sense of what it was really like to be on the moon. In a way, that was my original idea for *Moonseed*; a book about the real experience of the moon. The moon's stranger than you'd think, and it's certainly stranger than the astronauts were encouraged to report. The surface is gentle slopes, like ski slopes or sand dunes, and the gravity's gentle obviously, so you can't tell which way up you are. The pull on your inner ear is low and there's no obvious vertical like a tree or buildings to help you. Sometimes mission control observed the astronauts leaning, and they'd think it was oxygen problems or something. But no; they just couldn't tell which way up they were. And if you're standing on the moon it's so small you can actually see the curve, the way you can see the Earth curve from a high-altitude plane. You can't

tell how far away things are because there are no visual clues. There's no sense of perspective. The way moon dust fell from your feet was rather like walking on crisp snow. But none of this was ever really reported because the astronauts were mostly pilots and scientists and they were just not encouraged to speak in that way. It was also partly because NASA was trying to encourage the idea that going to the moon was a routine thing. Well, it isn't. But you can find all this stuff if you go through the transcripts of the missions, and the briefings after the missions in which the early astronauts were trying to help the later crews by telling them what to expect."

Maybe we should have sent writers, poets or artists. Or perhaps NASA should be arranging virtual-reality tours of the moon in order to get people interested in those more metaphysical aspect of the experience. "I agree. Virtual reality is the next best thing. But there are many simple things you can do to make these experiences real. For instance, NASA is putting a microphone on one of the forthcoming Mars landers, for the first time. You'll hear the winds of Mars. What an obvious thing to do. It'll be ounces in terms of weight to take. Why didn't they do that 20 years ago? Even in 1969, going to the moon, they didn't take really high-quality movie cameras. Which again would have been a couple of pounds in weight. So the experience was lost in a way. NASA was strangely bad at communicating for an organization that depends on public support and sympathy for its funding. The Mercury astronauts in particular were cold warriors; they were all military men and they were definitely our champions in space. You know, champions in the old sense of token warriors, up against Gagarin and all those Russians. I think NASA was image-conscious, but in a very narrow, Cold War way. Now they're much more aware of the importance of deeper issues. Their big focus these days is the search for life. They want to go to Mars, and to Europa, and to the clouds of Jupiter to look for signs of life. Which is a very good goal. But again there's a risk of disappointment. Everybody remembers the great fuss a couple of years ago about the Martian meteorite, which kind of fizzled to

nothing. The real science of that does seem to be quite exciting; it's evidence of water on Mars in the fairly recent past, meaning a few hundred million years ago. If the water was there then, maybe it's still there now. Maybe there was life of some kind. But there's no real evidence of life in the rock. So if you overplay your hand it's difficult to restore your position later. They launched a whole Mars exploration programme on the back of that announcement. That's what's being cut back now."

Such is Baxter's enthusiasm for space exploration that he came close to joining a mission himself. "I was never particularly athletic and I knew I couldn't be a super-hero space pilot like John Glenn. I was never going to be that physically tough. But then things got easier with the shuttle. I mean, the shuttle is no more difficult than riding a roller-coaster in terms of g-forces. I realized that I could go. The opportunity came in 1991, when the Russians started to advertise for a candidate to fly up to Mir, and it was basically an open application. I remember the ad in the paper: 'Astronaut wanted, no experience necessary.' So I applied, and I got through several of the stages. I was about the right height and weight, the right level of fitness. I've got a science background and that was important for them, because there had to be a genuine scientific element to the mission. So I got through all this stuff and thought, 'Well, I'm not in the capsule yet, but...' I failed because I didn't have a language. I'm not fluent in any foreign language, and I admitted to it. That was the killer because you had to communicate with the Russian astronauts. French would have done because apparently they all speak that. I always regretted not telling a little white lie, and in the months it would have taken to process my application I could have bought a box of Paul Daniels tapes. It was a job a British astronaut, Helen Sharman, got in the end. Though I think Helen Sharman was a bit of a PR exercise. But I got to the last 50 or so, and I got a trip to Moscow."

Moonseed is predicated on the idea of a rock-eating dust, almost like a virus, that threatens to devour Earth. How far is this stretching scientific plausibility? "Well, I got the idea from reading about a genuine life form, a kind of sponge, which eats its way into rock with acid and uses bits of quartz as part of its body structure. I was also thinking about a world like the moon, which is essentially nothing but rock, and wondering what

*It might be comforting
to go forward a couple
of centuries and find
there was nobody there...*

kind of life could subsist there. You've got plenty of energy from sunlight, but the only other resources are rock and silicone, rather than the biological structures we inhabit on Earth. I developed the idea further and thought about all the rock floating around out there in the solar system; the meteorites, and the asteroids whose ice and other volatiles have been blasted off by the sun's heat. My feeling was that if life of that kind could get started it could live almost anywhere. You've also got the possibility of flight between the stars via asteroids and extinct comets being slingshot out of the solar system. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed plausible. If life of the kind I postulate got going in the first place



it would be very mobile, very flexible, very tough. Presumably it would hibernate for long periods and could spread a long way. So I don't think it's stretching the bounds of probability that much. To make it a genuine threat to the Earth, though, I built in all the fancy physics and high-energy stuff. I wanted something Earth-gobbling and perhaps I pushed the scenario a bit further there. But really, you would think that life ought to try to adapt itself to the most common resources around, and since in space that's rock, then why not rock?"

As Britain's leading hard-sf writer, presumably Baxter gets irritated when he reads a piece of fiction where the science is sloppy or illogical. Is he a purist in that sense? "I think I am. I wouldn't want to sound snobbish, because it is fiction after all, and I'm quite happy to cut corners for the sake of a story as long as the ideas are essentially there, but if it's a shoddy piece of research, if it's something that could be checked by anybody, then I do get irritated. Just as I would expect readers to get irritated if I wrote about the House of Commons and didn't check where the Prime Minister's office is. If it's things you can check, I think you should. It's lazy not to. I mean, why would you put out a book that's less than as good as you can possibly make it? Which includes checking all the facts that you can." Is he saying you have to have a scientific background in order to write science fiction? "No, I'm not. But for my kind of fiction it does help. I understand science and the scientific mind-set, and the lessons science is teaching us. My background really helps me get into that, and it's what motivates my fiction a lot of the time. I suspect if you haven't had that kind of training at least to A-level it's much more difficult to access it. Things are getting better now that scientists themselves are becoming good writers. You've got people like Ian Stewart and Stephen Hawking starting to communicate their ideas in accessible ways. This is all a good thing. It's a way of making a genuine scientific debate more available to people. I wouldn't be writing what I'm writing now without my science background. But on the other hand I'm not writing science. Sometimes I have to kick myself to remind myself of that."

Did he have to kick himself when he was writing *The Time Ships*, his sequel to Wells' *The Time Machine*, bearing in mind that many scientists regard the notion of time travel as sheer fantasy? "Time travel is a good example of something that's become more intellectually respectable with

the scientists. Carl Sagan, for instance, who figured out how a wormhole would work for space travel. Once they had that, they realized it could be used for time travel as well. So we've had a respectable 15-year debate about whether time travel could actually be made to work, and what it would mean. All those hoary old dilemmas from science fiction are now being essayed again by the physicists. But I don't think science fiction is really about science. Even my kind of science fiction isn't really about science. I would say it's about what science and the scientific view has taught us about the world and about ourselves. To realize that we've come to an understanding of the universe that applies everywhere seems quite magical in a way. You can predict what the moon will be like, and then you go there and it's true. Or better still you can go there and find it's *not* true, because your guesses were wrong. But your knowledge advances all the time."

Has this accumulation of knowledge lead Baxter to adopt an optimistic attitude towards Humanity's long-term chances of survival? "That's difficult to answer because optimism and pessimism are a question of timescale. If I say, 'I believe the human race is doomed, we've got 50 years,' that's pessimistic. But if I say, 'I think we're going to last a million years and then we're doomed,' that seems optimistic. A million years is longer than *Homo sapiens* have had so far, but it's still pretty pessimistic when you think that the stars won't go out for another hundred billion years. If I say I think the human race has got a chance of lasting forever, beyond the death of the stars, which is what my new book's going to be about, that seems ludicrously grandiose. Yet to forecast extinction at any point is kind of pessimistic. So it's very difficult when you think in these cosmic terms. My overall view is that we're approaching a bottleneck where the mess we're making of everything is possibly outstripping our ability to cope with it all. I mean the environment, overpopulation and so on. If you look a bit further ahead there are plenty of hazards that might come our way over the next few thousand years. The big forgotten one is the ice age, and that's due back within 5,000-10,000 years, which is not very long in historical terms. Would we cope with an Ice Age if it started tomorrow? I don't think so. We're also overdue a gigantic volcanic event. The planet's been fairly quiet volcanically during recorded history, but there have been some immense events outside recorded history. Half

of India is underscored by huge lava flows. If something like that turned up now we'd be in big trouble. I'd feel a lot more sanguine about the future of the human species if we had a thousand people on the moon, enough for a self-sustaining colony. If we can get through the next century or so, if nothing too bad happens, and if we can get people off the planet, achieving the old Heinlein cliché of having two baskets to keep our eggs in, then we've got a chance of going on indefinitely as far as I can see. But maybe not in the form of human life as we know it. We're very fragile creatures really. We've evolved for five billion years to be here at the bottom of a muddy pond of air in this one-g field, and if we step outside it's very risky. If you lived for a year on the moon, is that sufficient gravity to keep your bones from rotting away? It's clear that if you went to Mars you'd soak up more radiation on the way than is recommended for your lifetime dose. Humans as we know them, as we are today, are quite delicate creatures and it could well be that after a couple of centuries of living on the moon our descendants wouldn't look much like us. We'll have descendants in a kind of linear way but they won't be like us, they might not sympathize with us."

What about the argument that humanity isn't a question of external appearance but internal thoughts, emotions and attitudes? "I'm not sure if I believe that. So much of what you are internally is shaped by what you do externally. We're bound to this mortal frame with its pleasures and its problems. If we ever got to the brain-in-a-tank point it's difficult to know

how human we could claim to be. Perhaps we'll find out. In a hundred years people could be living on Mars, or maybe in an exotic environment like in free-fall round the asteroids. But it wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing if the human race was replaced by a better successor. There were primates around in the dinosaurs' days, trembling in underground burrows as huge lizards stomped around above. They were like little rats or voles, and not very prepossessing, yet they were our ancestors. Maybe if they had a choice they wouldn't want to disappear and evolve into something else. But I don't think many people would argue that it wasn't a change for the better. Sometimes I'm accused of being an optimist, because if you write about humans surviving even a century or so from now it's expansive and optimistic even if it's a terrible future. But it is fiction, after all. It's not prediction, it's not propaganda. If it's anything, it's a commentary to make you think rather than persuade you, if you see what I mean. I'm occasionally asked where I'd go if I had a time machine. Most people would say somewhere in the past, back to see Christ or the dinosaurs or whatever. I wouldn't do that. We know roughly what the history of the universe has been. I'd go forward as far as I could, and kind of look for answers at the back of the book. It might be comforting to go forward a couple of centuries and find there was nobody there, to find the human race finished, the story closed."

That's comforting? "In a sense, yes. You'd know you're not going to miss too much. It would also give us a great sense of responsibility. If we do destroy ourselves in something ridiculous like a nuclear war, then what a waste, you know? If it's difficult for mind to arrive you have an even greater responsibility to cherish it."

What's his view on life elsewhere in the universe? "I'm sure it's there, but I think it's going to be pond scum or little sucker creatures clinging on in inhospitable environments like volcano vents. Life on Earth got started very quickly, but it took a billion years to progress from one-celled creatures to multi-celled creatures, and even longer to progress to advanced animals. And that was in the reasonably stable environment Earth has provided. On Mars or Venus, and maybe even Europa, there have been episodes where it was warm and wet, perhaps suitable for life to get going, but those planets quickly tipped into one extreme or another. Mars is like an extreme ice age, Venus is an extreme greenhouse. So you can imagine life starting but then having no real opportunity to grow and develop, and



just kind of clinging on. I wouldn't be at all surprised if we found life on Mars, but I would be absolutely amazed if it had advanced to anything above one-celled creatures. I'd be astonished if there was anything resembling actual intelligence there. Looking further out, I really do buy the argument that if there were many intelligent species out there we'd see them, we'd see signs, we'd see something. Because the universe is so old it would take a comparatively short time to colonize the galaxy if you set your mind to it, and you'd only need one race to do that. We'd surely see signs of some kind; an instability, something that shouldn't be there and can't be explained by natural laws. It's possible we're just not recognizing it, but I find that hard to believe. Stars and galaxies are actually pretty simple objects which we understand quite well, and we don't see any sign of intelligence on a large scale out there. I'm sure life isn't unique to Earth but I'm also pretty sure that *intelligence* may be unique to Earth."

Doesn't mathematics say that one is an impossible number? In an infinite or near infinite universe the idea that ours is the only species to have achieved intelligence surely beggars belief. "There are only two possible numbers: one or very many. You can imagine unique events, but if it's not unique then you wouldn't expect two, you'd expect loads of them. You could say that two is more unlikely than one. The universe is not infinitely old, which is the main point. It's about 20 billion years old and the Earth is about five billion years old. Our kind of life has arisen in the last billion years or so, in terms of the complex forms. A billion, two billion; a theorist would say that's the same order of magnitude. So we're pretty early in the life of the universe. If the universe was a hundred times as old and we'd arisen in the same time scale as we have, you could deduce it's very unlikely we'd be unique. There would have been time for other species to come along."

This is rather at odds with the current millennial obsession with supposed alien visitations and abductions. We get into discussing how the decline of religion seems to have people casting around for "something out there" that's somehow better or more morally advanced than us. "I was brought up as a Catholic," Baxter explains. "I went to Catholic schools until I was 18. We had Mass twice a week and two periods of religion a day. So I come from a fairly strict Catholic background, though I'm kind of lapsed now, I'd say. But I'm not sure that upbringing has been bad for me, because at least I under-

stand the religious worldview, the kind of deeper yearnings religion strives to fulfil. Christianity is about a structure to the universe and the beginning and end of things, which is really the modern scientific view as well. I don't think that's a coincidence. Modern science has arisen from Christian society, so it's not surprising that it's got the same kind of elements, but with God replaced by the physical laws. Christianity has contributed a lot to what I write. It surprised me a bit when critics of my early books, the Xeelee sequence, said they were really *Paradise Lost*. It's war in heaven, it's a conflict between huge forces of Good and Evil with humans caught in the middle. Which is a kind of cartoon rendering, I suppose, of Christian theology. That's always going to be there in my fiction, which is a good thing I think."

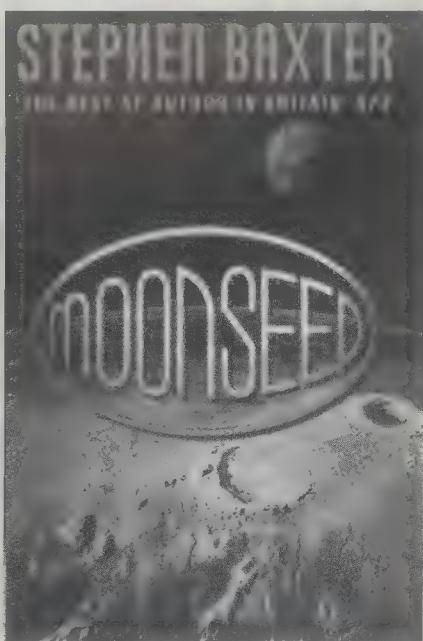
Is it possible that his religious upbringing might have influenced his view that other intelligent life may not exist in the universe? Could the doctrine that Man is a unique creation have seeped into his reasoning? "I don't think so. Although I was being taught strict Catholicism on the one hand, on the other hand I went straight into modern physics, and that was really more of an influence. I've got a Maths degree, and all these arguments about other life forms are mathematical. It's statistics. What's the probability that there's going to be life of our kind out there? I formed my own view that it seems extremely unlikely. That's science rather than religion."

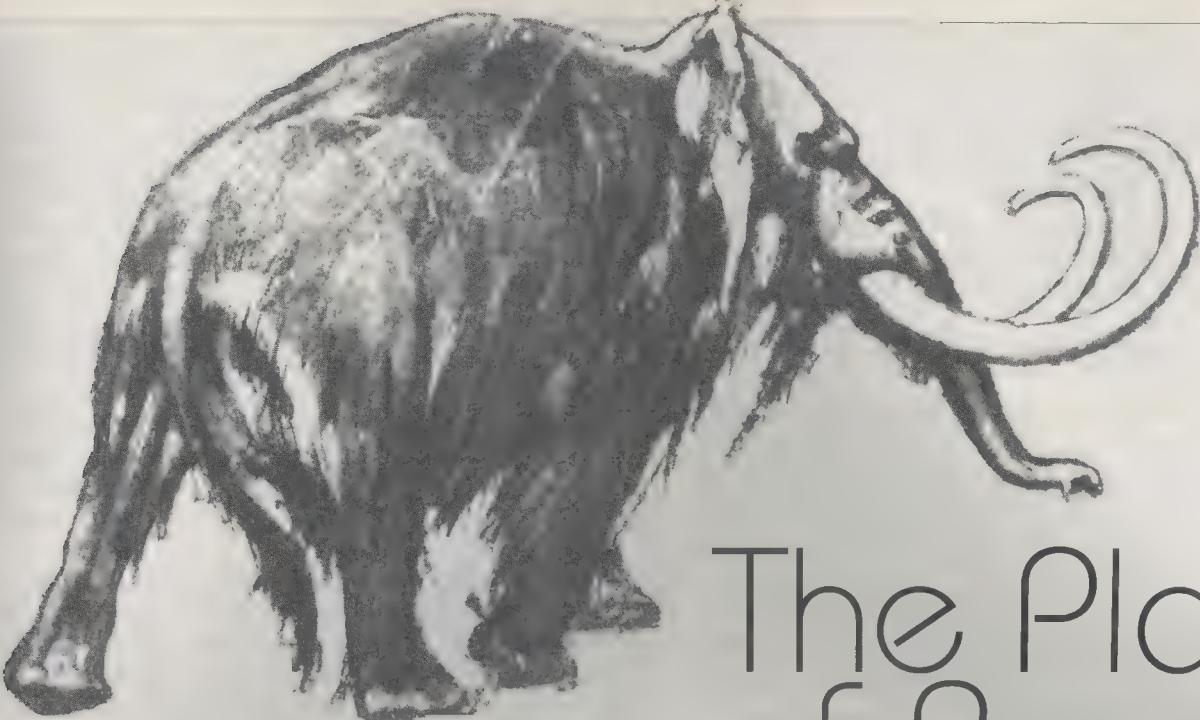
As to science fiction, *Moonseed* is certainly his most accessible novel to date in terms of a general rather than specialist audience. This was inten-

tional. "The story's set mostly on Earth and I deliberately chose low-key locations. Half of it's set in Scotland just to make it accessible to people who wouldn't usually read sf. Publishers are always keen to break science fiction and sf writers out of the genre ghetto and into a broader market. That's a good thing. I like to think my books would appeal to real science-fiction aficionados but also to somebody who just picks them up and hasn't read any sf before. On the other hand, if you're published in a genre like science fiction you're going to get a very loyal audience. Whereas you might pick up the new Martin Amis and not feel tempted to buy his entire oeuvre. Then again, sf is limited in size. Even the biggest science-fiction hit is only going to reach a certain portion of the population. But there are ways round it, I think. We find ourselves watching science fiction without even thinking about it, because it's kind of worked its way into the mainstream. As Fred Pohl says, the science-fiction movies you see and the TV stuff, *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*, is great sf of the 1920s. Maybe it's a place to start and maybe in 50 years' time they might have achieved the level of sophistication of the literature now. There are some authors, and I wouldn't mention any names, who have grown up on *Star Trek* and not really read or thought much beyond that. So you get essentially *Star Trek* plots with a different name. It's as if we're all going backwards and in danger of losing that sophistication."

But he isn't pessimistic about science fiction's future. "Absolutely not. My books are selling well all over the world, and people like McAuley, Ken MacLeod and Benford are very popular. Science fiction in terms of volume of sales is doing well. I know individual publishers moan and complain, but just wander around a bookshop and look at the choice today. It's immense, and clearly a big category in every major book outlet, which is terrific. Okay, half of it might be taken up by *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* spinoffs, but there's clearly space in sf for the real literature. By its nature science fiction is never going to be as formulaic as other genres, like mysteries, and it's never going to be so bound by settings the way westerns are. Therefore it just can't lose its appeal, and it's a genre that can adapt with the times. You could say it is the genre of our times. Science-fiction fans would say that, I suppose, but I think it's nevertheless true. Science fiction has a great future."

Moonseed is published by Voyager at £16.99





The Plain of Bones

Stephen Baxter

Arctic summer: the sun arced around the sky's north pole, somehow aimlessly, and at midnight it rolled lazily along the horizon. It was a single day, long and crystalline, that would last for two months, an endless day of feeding and breeding and dying.

At midnight, Silverhair, walking slowly with her Family across the thawing plain, saw that she cast a shadow, ice-sharp, that stretched to the horizon. She felt oddly weighed down by the shadow, as if it was some immense tail she must drag around with her. But the light turned everything to gold, and made the bedraggled mammoths, with their clouds of loose moulted fur, glow as if on fire.

They reached an area of tundra new to Silverhair. The mammoths, exhausted, spread slowly over the landscape. As the thaw arrived, they found enough to drink in the melt pools that gathered over the permafrost. On days that were excessively hot – because mammoths do not sweat – they would reduce heat by panting, or they would find patches of soft snow to stand in, sometimes eating mouthfuls of it.

The changes in the land were dramatic now; for, after a month of continuous daylight, the sun was high and hot enough to melt ice. Rock began to protrude through the thawing hillsides, and blue meltwater glimmered on the frozen lakes. In sheltered valleys there were already patches of sedge and grass, green and meadow-like. After months of frozen whiteness the land was becoming an intricate pattern of black and white and green. This emerging panorama – shimmering with moist light, draped in mist and fog – was still wreathed in silence. But already the haunting calls of Arctic loons echoed to the sky from the melt pools.

The mammoths slept and fed in comparative comfort, and time wore away, slowly and unmarked. It was, all

things considered, a happy time. But Silverhair's spirits did not rise. She took to keeping her distance from the others. She sought out patches of higher ground, her trunk raised.

For there was something carried to her by the wind off the sea – something that troubled her to the depths of her soul.

Wolfnose joined her. The ancient Cow stood alongside Silverhair, feeling with her trunk for rich patches of grass, then trapping tufts between her trunk and tusks and pulling them out.

Silverhair waited patiently. Wolfnose seemed to be moving more slowly than ever, and her rheumy eyes, constantly watering, must be almost blind now. So worn were Wolfnose's teeth it took her a long time to consume her daily meals. And when she passed dung, Silverhair saw that it was thin and sour-smelling, and contained much unchewed grass and twigs, and even some indigestible soil which Wolfnose, in her gathering blindness, had scooped into her mouth.

But, even as her body failed, Wolfnose seemed to be settling into a new contentment. "This is a good time of year," she rumbled at last. She quoted the Cycle. "*When the day becomes endless, we shed our cares with our winter coats...*"

An observer watching the Family would have seen the mammoths dancing in their baffling circles, trumpeting and growling and stomping, even emitting high-pitched, bird-like squeaks with their trunks. Perhaps, with patience, one might have deduced some simple patterns: the humming sound that indicated a warning, a roar that was a signal to attack, the whistling that meant that one of the Family was injured or in distress.

But mammoth speech is based not just on the sounds mammoths make – from the ground-shaking stomps,

through low-pitched rumbles, bellows, trumpets and growls, to the highest chirrups of their trunks – but also on the complex dances of their bodies, and changes in how they smell or breathe or scratch, even the deep throb of their pulses. All of this makes mammoth speech richer than any other language.

So, as Wolfnose ground her grass contentedly, her great jaw moving back and forth, she talked with Silverhair. “But you are not happy, child. Even my old eyes can see that much.”

Silverhair blurted, “Wolfnose – what do you *smell* here?”

For answer, Wolfnose patiently finished her mouthful of grass. Then she raised her trunk and turned it this way and that. She said at last, “There is the salt of the sea, to the west. There is the crisp fur of wolves, the sour droppings of lemmings, the stink of the guano of the gulls at the coast...”

“But no mammoths.” Silverhair meant the complex of smells which characterized mammoths to each other: the smells of moist hair, dung, mothers’ milk.

Wolfnose said, “No. But there is –”

Silverhair trembled. “There is the stink of death – of dead mammoths.”

Wolfnose lowered her trunk and turned calmly to Silverhair.

“It isn’t what you think.”

Silverhair snapped, “I’ll tell you what I *do* think. I think it is the stench of some other Family’s rotting corpses.” She felt an unreasonable anger at Wolfnose’s calm patience.

“I’ll tell you the truth,” Wolfnose said. “I can’t say what’s become of the other Families. It’s certainly a long time – too long – since any of us met a mammoth from another Family, and you know my fears about *that*. But that scent has another meaning. Something wonderful.”

“Wonderful? Can death be wonderful?”

“Yes. Come on.”

And with that, ripping another mouthful of grass from the clumps at her feet, Wolfnose began to walk towards the west.

Silverhair, startled, came to herself and hurried to catch up with Wolfnose. It did not take long, for Wolfnose’s arthritic gait was so forced and slow that Silverhair thought even a glacier could outrun her now.

She called, “Where are we going?”

“You’ll find out when we get there. Keep up, now...”

The sun completed many rounds in the sky as the two mammoths walked on.

Silverhair paused frequently to feed. Her trunk was busy and active, like an independent creature, as it worked at the ground. She would wrap her trunk-fingers around the sparse tufts of grass she found under the snow, cramming the dark green goodies into her small mouth, and grind them between her great molar teeth with a back-and-forth movement of her jaw. The grass, the last of the winter, was coarse, dry and unsatisfying, as was the rest of her diet of twigs and bark of birches, willows and larches; with a corner of her mind she looked forward to her richer summer feast to come.

And she would lift her anus flap and pass dung, briskly and efficiently, as mammoths must ten or twelve times a day. The soft brown mass settled to the ice behind her, steaming; it would enrich the soil it touched, and the seeds that had passed through Silverhair’s stomach would germinate and turn the land green.

The thawing ground was moist and fragile under Silverhair’s feet, and every footprint left a scar. In fact the plain was criss-crossed by the trails of mammoths, wolves, foxes and other animals, made last summer and the years before. It could take ten years for the fragile tundra to grow over a single footprint.

Overhead the snow geese were winging to their breeding grounds to the north, skein after skein of them passing across the blue sky. Occasionally, over the lakes, the geese plummeted from the sky to reach water through thin ice.

It was a harsh place. Few plants could survive the combination of the summer’s shallow thawed-out soil and the intensely bitter winds of winter. But now, on the ground, from under the melting snow, the frozen world was coming to life. Dead-looking stems bore tiny leaves and flowers, and the land was peppered with green and white and yellow. The first insects were stirring too. There were flies in the air, and spiders and mites toiling on the ground, as if impatient to begin life’s brief adventure.

The lemmings seemed plentiful this year. Their heads popped up everywhere from their holes in the snow, and in some places their busy teeth had already denuded the land. But the lemming hunters were here too. As soon as any lemming left its ball-shaped nest a long-tailed skua would take off after it, yelping display-calls emanating from its hooked beak.

Wolfnose brought Silverhair to rich pastures, urging her to remember them for the future. She said, “You must understand why the grass grows so well here. Once there were many mammoths here – many Families, many Clans. And they had favourite pastures, where their dung would be piled thick. The Clans are gone now – all save ours – but, even after so long, their dung enriches the Earth...”

Silverhair stared with awe at the thick-growing grass, a vibrant living memorial to the great mammoth herds of long ago.

They battled through a storm.

The snow and fog swirled around them, matting their hair with freezing moisture, at times making it impossible for them to see more than a few paces ahead. But Silverhair knew this was the last defiant bellow of the dying winter, and she kept her head down and used her bulk to drive herself forward across a tundra that was like a frozen ocean.

And they walked by night, when the only light came from the Moon, which cast a glittering purple glow on the fields of ice and snow. At such times the world was utterly still and silent, save for their own breathing, herself and Wolfnose the only moving things in all this world of white and blue and black.

Silverhair walked steadily and evenly. Her bulk was

dark and huge. Her walk was a sway of liquid grace, her head nodding with each step, her trunk swaying before her, its great weight obvious. And when she ran her footsteps were firm, her powerful legs remaining stiff beneath her great weight, her feet swelling slightly as they absorbed her bulk.

Her head was large, with a high dome on her crown. Her face, with its long jaw, was surprisingly graceful. Her shoulders had a high hump, behind which her back sloped markedly from front to rear.

Her tusks, sprouting from their deep sockets at the front of her face, twisted before her in a loose spiral, their tips almost touching before her. The undersides of both her tusks were worn, for she used them to strip bark and dig up plants – and, in the depths of winter, her tusks served as a snow plough to dig out vegetation for feeding, or even as an ice-breaker to expose water to drink in frozen ponds. The bluish ivory of the tusks was finely textured, with growth rings that mapped her age. Her trunk had two finger-like extensions at its tip, for manipulating grass and other small objects. As it worked, the trunk's surface folded and wrinkled, betraying the complexity of its muscles.

A heavy coat of orange-brown fur covered Silverhair's body. Over a fine downy underwool, her guard hairs were long, coarse and thick, springy and transparent. And, in a broad cap between the eyes, there lay the patch of snow-white fur that had given her her name.

Silverhair was *mammuthus primigenius*: a woolly mammoth.

Thousands of years before, creatures like Silverhair had populated the fringe of the retreating northern ice caps – right around the planet, through Asia from the Baltic to the Pacific, across North America from Alaska to Labrador. But those days were gone.

The isolation of this remote Island, off the northern coast of Siberia, had saved Silverhair and her ancestors from the extinction which had washed over the mainland, claiming her cousins and many other large animals.

But now the mammoths were trapped here, on the Island. And Silverhair and her Family were the last of her kind, the last in all the world.

They came at last to the western coast.

The sea was still largely frozen. Sanderling and bunting searched for seeds in the snow, ducks dived through narrow leads in the thin ice, and skuas stood expectantly on prominent rocks. On the cliff below, barnacle geese were already incubating their clutches of eggs, still surrounded by the brilliant white of snow.

The smells of salt water and guano were all but overpowering. But it was here that the stink of rotten mammoth flesh was strongest of all, and Silverhair was filled with a powerful dread.

They came to a shallow, rounded hill. Silverhair could see that it had been badly eroded by recent rainstorms; deep gullies ran down its side, as if scored there by giant tusks.

Wolfnose edged forward, and poked at the ground with her trunk. "This is called a *yedoma*," she said. "It

is a hill mostly made of ice. Come now."

She led Silverhair around the flank of the hill. The death stink grew steadily stronger, until Silverhair could hardly bear to take another step. But Wolfnose marched stolidly on, her trunk raised, and Silverhair had no option but to follow.

And they came to a place where the *yedoma*'s collapsing flank had exposed the corpse of a mammoth.

Wolfnose stood back, her trunk raised. "Tell me what you see, little Silverhair," she said gently.

Silverhair, shocked and distressed, stepped forward slowly, nosing at the ground with her trunk. "I think it was a Bull..."

The dead mammoth was lying on his side. Silverhair could see that the flesh and skin on which he lay were mostly intact: she could make out his ear on that side, his flank, the skin on his legs, the long dark hair of winter tangled in frozen mud.

But the upper side of the Bull had been stripped of its flesh by the sharp teeth of scavengers. The meat was almost completely removed from the skull, and the ribcage, and even the legs. There was no sign of the Bull's trunk. The pelvis, shoulder-blade and several of the ribs were broken and scattered. Inside the rib-cage nestled a dark, lumpy mass, still frozen hard; perhaps it was the heart and stomach of this dead mammoth.

The Bull, she found, still had traces of food in the ruin of his mouth: grass and sedge, just as she had eaten today. He must have died rapidly, then: too rapidly even to swallow his last meal.

The flensed skull gleamed white in the pale sunlight. Its empty eye socket seemed to stare at her accusingly.

She heard a soft growl. She turned, trumpeting.

A wolf stood there, its fur white as snow. It was a bitch; Silverhair could see swollen dugs dangling beneath her chest.

Silverhair lowered her head, trumpeted, and lunged at the wolf. "Get away, cub of Aglu, or I will drive my tusks into you!"

The wolf dropped her ears and ran off.

Silverhair, breathing hard, returned to Wolfnose. "If she returns I will kill her."

Wolfnose said, "No. She has her place, as we all do. She probably has cubs to feed."

"She has been chewing on the corpse of this Bull!"

Wolfnose trumpeted mockingly. "And what difference does that make to him now? He has belonged to the wolves for a long time: in fact, longer than you think, little Silverhair..."

Silverhair returned to her inspection of the ravaged corpse. "I don't recognize him. He must be from a Family I never met."

"You don't understand yet," Wolfnose said gently. "Perhaps he was grazing at the soft edge of a gully or a river bluff. Perhaps he lost his footing, became trapped. The wolves would work at him, and in time he would die. But then, at last, he would be enveloped by the soil, saturated by water, frozen by winter's return."

"But the river mud that destroyed him also preserved him."

"For you see, if your body happens to be sealed inside

ice, it can be saved. The ice, freezing, draws out the moisture that would otherwise rot your flesh... If you were sealed here, Silverhair, although your spirit would long have flown to the aurora, your body would live on – as long as it remained inside the ice, it would be as well preserved as this."

"How long?"

Wolfnose said, "Perhaps Great-Years. Perhaps longer..."

Silverhair was stunned.

She could reach down with her trunk and touch the hair of this Bull's face. The Bull might have been dead only a few days. And yet – could it be true? – he was separated from her by Great-Years.

"Now," said Wolfnose. "Look with new eyes; lift your trunk and smell..."

Silverhair, a little bewildered, obeyed.

And, now that her eyes and nostrils were accustomed to the stink of the ancient corpse beside her, she saw that this landscape was not as it had seemed.

It was littered with bones.

Here was a femur, a leg-bone, thrusting defiantly from the ground. Here was a set of ribs, broken and scattered, split as if some scavenger had been working to extract the marrow from their cores. And there a skull protruded from the ground, as if some great beast were burrowing upwards from within the Earth.

Wolfnose said, "The bones and bodies are stored in the ground. But when the ice melts and they are exposed – after Great-Years of stillness and dark – there is a moment of daylight, a flash of activity. The wolves and birds soon come to take away the flesh, and the bones are scattered by the wind and the rain. And then it is done. The ancient bodies evaporate like a grain of snow on the tongue. So you see you are fortunate to have witnessed this rare moment of surfacing, Silverhair."

Mammoths are a very old species, and they know time, deep within themselves. They can measure the slow migration of shadows across the land, the turning faces of Arctic poppies, the strength of air currents. So massive are mammoths that they can *feel* the turn of the Earth on its axis, the slow pulse of the seasons as the Earth spins in its stately annual dance, making the sun arc across the sky – and, so deep and long are their memories, they are even aware of the greater cycles of the planet. They speak of the *Great-Year*, the 20,000-year nod of the precessing axis of the spinning planet. And the mammoths know even the million-year cycle of the great ice sheets, which lap against the mountains like huge frozen waves.

So Silverhair knew time. She knew how she was embedded in the great hierarchy of Earth's rhythms.

Silverhair imagined the days of long ago – perhaps when the crushed corpse she had seen had been proud and full of life – days different from now, days when the Clan had covered the Island, days when Families had merged and mingled in the great migrations like rivers flowing together. Days when mammoths had been more numerous, on the Island and beyond, than summer flowers on the tundra.

She was standing on a ground filled with the bodies

of mammoths, generations of them stretching back Great-Years and more, bodies that were raised to glimmer in the sun and evaporate like dew. For the first time in her life she could see the great depth of mammoth history behind her: 40 million years of it, stretching back to Kilukpuk herself in her Swamp, a great sweep of time and space of which she was just a part.

Like the bones of this long-dead Bull, her soul was merely the fragment of all that mystery which happened to have surfaced in the here and now. And like the Bull, her soul would be worn away and vanished in an instant.

Silverhair felt the world shift and flow around her, as if she herself was caught up by some great river of time.

And she was proud, fiercely proud, to be mammoth.

"We should Remember the one in the *yedoma*," she said.

"Of course we should," said Wolfnose. "For he has no one left to do it for him."

And so the two mammoths touched the vacant skull with their trunks, and lifted and sorted the bones. Then they gathered twigs and soil and cast it on the ancient corpse, and touched it with the sensitive pads of their back feet, and they stood over it as the sun wheeled around the sky. They were trying to Remember the spirit which had once occupied this body, this Bull with no name who might have been the ancestor of them both, just as they would have done had they come upon the body of one of their own Family.

When they were done the two mammoths turned away from the setting sun, side by side, and prepared for the long walk back to their Family.

At the last moment, Wolfnose stopped and turned back. "Silverhair – what of the tusks?"

Silverhair had not noticed the Bull's tusks, one way or another. She trotted back to the *yedoma*.

The tusks had not been snapped away by whatever accident had befallen this Bull, for the stumps in the skull were sharply terminated, in clean, flat edges. And the tusks themselves were missing; there was no sign of them, not so much as a splinter.

She returned to Wolfnose and told her this.

Wolfnose said, "There is only one scavenger who covets our tusks." For the first time, Silverhair detected fear in the voice of the old one. "Humans have been here. We must get back to the Family. Quickly, now..."

Alarmed, their shadows stretching ahead of them, the two mammoths hurried across the tundra.

The above story is extracted and adapted from *Mammoth Book 1: Silverhair*, published by Orion Millennium in February 1999.



Stephen Baxter's most recent stories in *Interzone* were "War Birds" (issue 126), "The Twelfth Album" (issue 130) and "The Barrier" (issue 133). In the past decade he has become one of Britain's most prolific and popular sf writers.

Cairo was much on my mind as I travelled to meet Tom Holland. Not only had I recently finished reading his new novel, *The Sleeper in the Sands*, which is set there, but I had spent the academic year 1994-95 working there, and reading the book had brought back many memories. It had brought back those memories despite the fact that the book starts in 1922 and moves backwards through time in a series of turn-and-turnabout narratives as the search for the solution of the life-threatening puzzle is sought... Perhaps my heightened awareness of Egypt, therefore, was to blame for the fact that I even saw similarities between that country and the conurbation in which Holland lives: Brixton, South London. The excruciating noise levels are certainly similar, or were, at least, on this day; the multi-ethnicity, too; not to mention the kerbside arguments (two black kids were rowing about the relative merits of their yo-yos, with one saying, memorably, "Your string looks like doo-doo, man...").

Although Tom Holland has never lived in Egypt, he has visited the country several times ("a fascinating place, absolutely fascinating"). To my surprise, I found that he has also worked abroad as an English teacher, but in India: "a total culture shock." As it happens (and it doesn't happen often when I'm meeting someone for an interview) Holland and I have much in common. Give or take a year, we are approximately the same age. We have both travelled in Egypt a great deal; his real name sounds a little bit like my pseudonym (or the other way around). But my disconcerting discovery of a Spice Girls CD on his shelves should not go unmentioned ("it's not mine!" was swiftly offered.) We had brie, we had wine; and we started.

His writing life began, as many do, during the years of education: "When I was at university I wrote several plays, which did quite well. I wrote a ridiculous first novel, around 200,000 words long and I eventually sold it for about £500. I thought: this is ridiculous; it's miles below the minimum wage." This first-written piece was *Attis*: a scandalously forgotten and much underrated novel. "*Attis* was my first novel – and my attempt to write the great novel of the late 20th century. I put my heart and soul into it," Holland states, "as most first-time novelists do, I'm sure. I wrote it, sort of, with the frame of mind that this might be the only stab at writing that I might ever get. I'm not sure why. So there were all sorts of elements in it: it was a love story, a thriller, a political thriller, a murder mystery..."

VAMPIRES, SAND & HORSES



Tom Holland
interviewed by David Mathew

"If you read it, and then read some of my other work, there are clearly a number of themes that I've followed up on, later." He has a strong opinion of why this might be. "It's possible there's such a thing as creative DNA; that no matter what you write it might always have certain themes and interests with which you've become associated, somewhere in there. They're trademarks; they're give-aways: call them what you want. Do you see? Certain things are always going to turn up – with a particular novelist, or even short-story writer. In one way or another. *Attis* was about an Ancient Rome that was really modern London. It's about Catullus, the love poet."

While finishing up discussing *Attis*, Holland spoke a sentence that actually defines his entire *oeuvre* to date: "I'm very interested in historical anachronism." All of Holland's work takes a period of the past, and then removes its bones as though he was filleting fish. What he puts back in place of the bones is a *new* set of bones: and they fit the frame but they are carrying some sort of disease, maybe, that will leak into the historical present around them. At the very least they will make the historical period that he describes have a strange limp. By way of illustration of this point, Holland describes the process that led to *The Vampyre: Being the True Pilgrimage of George Gordon, Sixth Lord Byron* (1995) – usually called simply *The Vampyre*.

"At the same time I'd been doing a PhD on Byron and had been very struck by Byron's profound influence on the vampire myth; and the more I looked at Byron's biography the more it struck me that maybe Byron had *been* a vampire. So that was the idea behind the first book that got published, *The Vampyre*. And having written that, of course, I was expected to write something – no pun intended – in a similar vein. The publishers wanted another vampire book." While acknowledging his publisher's requests, Holland was not content to repeat *The Vampyre* simply under another name and character list. Instead, he looked at some of his early influences and interests: "Well, some of my great childhood enthusiasms had been Dracula, Sherlock Holmes and Dorian Gray. Cobblestones and hansom cabs: that sort of thing." And he started work on (in my opinion) his finest novel, *Supping With Panthers* – and I do not just love it because of its great title!

"What interests me in the supernatural," Holland said, "is its cultural specifics. What I don't like about a lot of vampire fiction, or a lot of horror

*"Genre shouldn't be
simply transparent;
genre reflects
the period it was
reflected in."*

fiction in general, I suppose, is the idea that you can just transpose the myths of one period onto another, without it being hopeless. Have you seen *Ultraviolet*? (An ITV show, bringing such issues under a modern spotlight, in the form of fiction, of course.) It's really good! But the problem with vampires in the contemporary is... well, it's like updating Shakespeare. The first matter is: why bother? But the second, and more important, matter is, if you *do* bother: What do you do with the religious angle? What do you do with the crucifixes, which aren't taken so seriously now? We can't pretend that the past never happened, obviously, or a lot of writers would be out of work. Personally, I've always been interested in seeing what myths mean to specific periods."

By common consensus, the novel that Tom Holland arrived with next was his darkest to date. *Deliver Us From Evil* (1997) is set in a period before the word 'vampire' even existed." When I reviewed the book at the beginning of 1998, I used phrases such as "a grim Marlovian parable." The book has old and evil forces arriving at the same historical time as a period of problems for the Commonwealth. A man named Faustus is present, who presents England with a blood-sucking army of the dead...

"Over those three vampire books I

was interested in seeing how the myth has evolved. I regard them more as historical novels than horror novels, really. *Deliver Us From Evil* is set in the 17th Century; there's an awful lot of novels set around the same period, but which suffer from an omniscient 20th-century perspective: that witchcraft didn't actually exist. Which I think is unfair. It's hard to get into the minds of characters if you don't take what they take seriously. So I wanted to take characters and take their fears both seriously and literally."

Tom Holland believes, I think it's true to say, in the idea of a writer taking responsibility – not only for the work that he has penned (which is fair enough), but also for the way that that same piece of work will make another person feel. For example, he said the following: "When you're writing horror, it's worms and guts, but then of course you have to read it back..." The implication being that an author should be able to deal with his own material in a level-headed manner: but what about those *readers* who cannot do so? Truly and personally, I don't think this is something that Holland need worry about too much. The sadistic thrill of voyeurism is not something that one might take from his books; few children, for instance, would be able to read and understand his work – they might as well stick to Richard Laymon. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Holland, having defended his work by saying, "I don't write schlock; I've never written schlock," confessed the squeamish side to his nature. I know of one other notable horror writer who cannot stand the sight of blood, but the idea of writing about what one cannot endure in this sense seemed amusing.

"I went to ante-natal class yesterday," Holland said. "We were shown a cutaway of the insides of the woman's body. Ugh! Disgusting! And would I like to cut the umbilical chord? No, thank you. I always go slightly faint at the sight of blood. That's why I think that of the first three books I find *Deliver Us From Evil* the darkest; it's the most upsetting one to read. It's the cruellest; the most remorseless." It does not cover pregnancy as a big issue, but I take his point: it's a gloomy read.

"The new book – *The Sleeper in the Sands* – is a logical development from my previous novels." It is also a notable departure from these. "There are some vampiric elements, but the vampire is very specifically a 19th-century literary invention. There are obviously analogies in other cultures, and I was interested in looking at

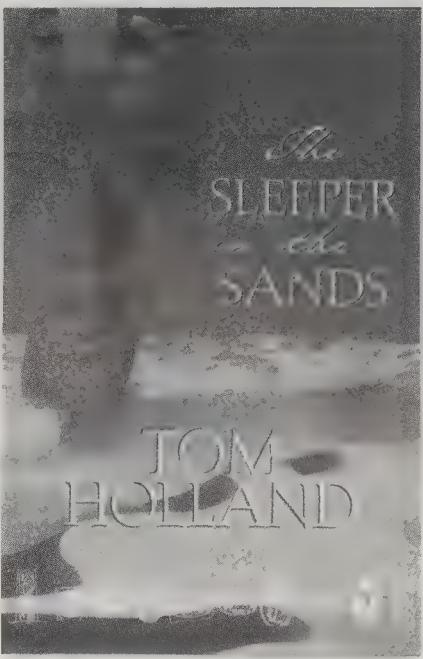
those. There are blood-drinking demons in Arabic mythology... It's about how different cultures see the same raw material and interpret it in different ways. For my first three novels, there was no doubt that within the context of the work, vampires do exist, whereas with *The Sleeper in the Sands* there is doubt.

"Howard Carter (the real-life explorer and archaeologist whose name Holland has used in a fictional setting) is a rationalist, and although most people would think that any book about Tut-ankh-Amen would be about the curse, that was not my primary concern. In the world of Howard Carter the curse doesn't exist; in the world of *The Arabian Nights* of mediaeval Cairo it does exist. In the world of Ancient Egypt it does exist as well. In those worlds, things like that were needed. So, what I hoped to do with *Sleeper in the Sands* was generate tensions between those three periods – so you're always seeing one period in the context of the other two. You're never absolutely certain, because I'm never saying: this is true, or this is true, or this is true. Most horror novels tend to say: this is what's happened; this is what's happening. I don't want to do that."

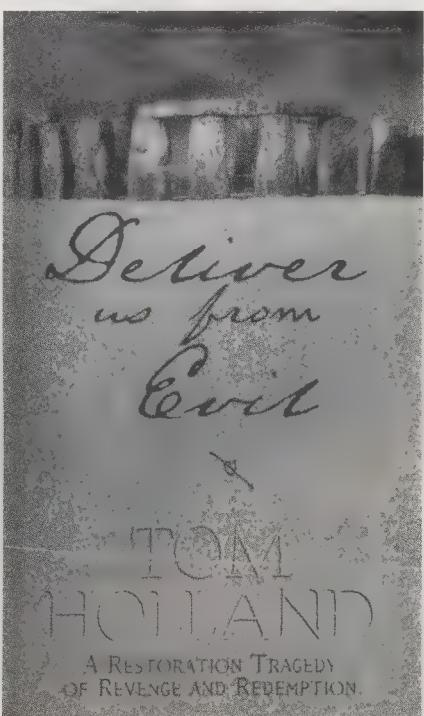
The novel, in fact, is analogous to walking on the sand that it describes, or has in the background: every now and then the reader sinks through to another level. I've said before that the structure is close to Charles Nodier's *Smarra* (and others, of course – but Nodier's the best.) We are walking on sand; how dare we assume that every step will support our weight? Every now and then we are bound to be whisked through, down onto another stratum, if you like. As it goes, the reader's possible experience – in this sense – chimes in with that of the man who inspired the entire tale.

"Howard Carter was riding on his horse and the horse's hoof went through the roof of a tomb; and there is the occasional story of a tourist wandering off and sinking into a tomb," Holland said. And he had other plans for *The Sleeper in the Sands*: "Also I wanted the structure of the book to mirror the structure of an Egyptian tomb. The idea of stories within stories is justified by the setting, because not only is Cairo the home of *The Arabian Nights*, it's also where most of the stories were written..."

"We can't have a realistic novel set in Ancient Egypt because we just don't know enough about it. If you try to write a realistic Egyptian novel, you'll have a set of people in Egyptian drag. But what we do know about Egyptian literature is, it was very



interested in short stories." It still is, I mentioned; although there are some great and good exceptions (Naguib Mahfouz springs to mind: the Cairo Trilogy and *Wedding Song*, all highly recommended), many contemporary Arabic writers continue to work in the shorter form. And short means a page or a few pages, not 40. Holland's opinion of his technique was: "It was a justified way of trying to get into the Egyptian mind. The main section in *The Sleeper in the Sands*, about Akh-en-Aten, is narrated by an Arab who doesn't necessarily know as much about ancient Egypt as we do,



so mistakes things in a way that we, the modern reader, particularly given the perspective we've received from Howard Carter, won't do. It's all about perceptions." The same is true of much of his output. "There are adaptations of history and even of the great myths, which are translated into Arabic. In *The Sleeper in the Sands*, Akh-en-Aten is recast as the hero of a mediaeval tale. In the end, the important fact I'd like to stress is that *Sleeper in the Sands* displays a similar relationship of the individual to a moment of time as, for example, Attis does. So I suppose I'm reinforcing my own theory about creative DNA. I wonder what any other writers would think..."

We talked some more about genre. It was the first time that Tom Holland had looked a little uncomfortable. "I think genre is very important," he began – but slowly. "Genre shouldn't be simply transparent; genre reflects the period it was reflected in." But what I'd been getting at, really, was how did he see himself as a horror writer; did he think of himself as occupying a particular spot in the marketplace? And this was better; this was something he could grasp on to. He said, "It's not so much that I'm not a horror writer; it's more that I don't believe 'horror' defines it. Which is not to say I'm above it, or anything like that, although I do think a lot of horror is – I'll say it again – rather schlocky. What I'm interested in, to a great extent, is people's attitudes to horror, and how those attitudes are influenced by the times through which the people are living. Horror, I think in my books, is a means to an end, rather than the end itself."

More as a general question as I was preparing to leave than part of the interview, I asked him how things were going. "Fine. Fine," he replied, and then added: "Please put in here that I said 'not big-headedly, not conceitedly' – something like that... I feel good about a number of things at the moment. I have high hopes for *The Sleeper in the Sands*, and I really want to promote it well. There'll be a book launch in the British Museum (in fact, it was on 19th November 1998) – in the Egyptian Room. I think it will be the first time that the room will be used to launch a non-Museum Press publication. That's quite exciting. And then I've got the next one to work on: a book set in America. I'm taking horse-riding lessons at the moment so that when I go over to do my research I don't end up looking like a complete tenderfoot, a complete novice. Learning to ride properly is a bit scary, though."

I'm writing at a sad time, following the deaths of two people whose names may be unfamiliar outside science-fiction fan circles. A. Vincent Clarke (1922-1998), one of Britain's best-loved connoisseurs of sf fanzines, died of pneumonia in late November following a lengthy illness. His *Science Fantasy News* was the essential British sf and fan newsletter of the 1950s, and he was the first winner of the TransAtlantic Fan Fund – which transports popular European fans to North America and vice-versa, and is still in operation. Professionally, he collaborated with Kenneth Bulmer on two 1952 novels; late in life he did much valuable research into British sf fandom's tangled history and bibliography. Meanwhile the young Australian cartoonist and humorist Ian Gunn also died in November after a long fight against cancer. His work had appeared in fanzines all over the world and brought him several Ditmar awards plus Fan Artist Hugo nominations in 1996, 1997 and 1998; he will be much missed.

THE NEGATIVE ONES

George Alec Effinger and **Barbara Hambly** were married in November.

Bob Kane (1916-1998), comics artist and co-creator in 1939 of Batman, died suddenly at his home on Los Angeles in early November. He was 82.

Ken MacLeod can barely contain his puking: "It is no coincidence," writes Minette Martin (*Sunday Telegraph*, November), 'that in *Brave New World* whole departments devoted themselves to erasing history and then rewriting it. It is no coincidence that it was a thoughtcrime to remember even a nursery rhyme[...]' Oppressed fans everywhere, rise up to correct this 'politically correct' rewriting of history!" And what about all that depraved soma-drinking in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, eh?

Sam Moskowitz's vast historical sf collection is to be auctioned by Sotheby's in June. The auction catalogue, expected to be available in late May, is likely to be a collectable item all by itself. (Moskowitz died in 1997.)

Robert Sawyer won the 1998 Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya (UPC) million-peseta prize with his short novel "Block Universe."

George Turner provides a posthumous challenge in *Dreaming Down Under* (ed. Jack Dann & Janeen Webb), an anthology of new Aussie sf. HarperCollins in Oz offer fame and publication to whoever writes the best ending for the collection's unfinished Turner novella.

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Publishers & Sinners. Gollancz SF (that is, the imprint's owner Cassell) was taken over not by Macmillan as threatened, but by Orion. Editor Jo Fletcher indicates that Gollancz's sf name value is understood: apparently Orion's Millennium imprint is being merged into the Gollancz sf list rather than the other way around.

Small Press. *The Small Press Guide 1999* (4th ed; 405pp) claims to be "The complete guide to poetry & small press magazines," though sf fanzine coverage is erratic. The entry for *The Celtic Pen* mysteriously lists "the 6 Celtic languages (Lush, Scots, Gaelic, Manx, Welsh, Breton and Cornish)." £9.99 from Writers' Bookshop, 1 Wainman Rd, Woodston, Peterborough, PE2 7BU... *Tanjen* announcement: "Due to financial pressures Tanjen is no longer able to accept manuscripts" ... *The Hugo, Nebula and World Fantasy Awards* by Howard DeVore, a long-running listing which includes all award nominations, had its first professional trade pb edition this year. 332pb; \$14 post free (surface; \$22 air to Europe) from Advent, PO Box A3228, Chicago, IL 60690, USA.

Worldcon 2002. The venue will be decided at the 1999 World SF Convention in Australia. Bidders were San Francisco and Seattle... but the latter has had to drop out because the regional manager of Starwood Hotels, which has a virtual monopoly on Seattle hotel rooms, has decided (despite pleas from the Mayor, local businesses and the convention centre) that no horrid sf conventions shall pollute his nice hotels. San Francisco is now unopposed.

Group Grope. *SF Ireland* (successor to the old Irish SFA) was launched at the 1998 Irish national sf convention. £12 annual subscription; frequent newsletter *Blank Space*. Contact 43 Eglinton Rd, Dublin 4, Ireland. *The Welsh SF Association* is also new, with vast and nebulous promotion/co-ordination plans; membership free, at least within Wales. SAE for details c/o GFF, 32 Theobald Rd, Canton, Cardiff, CF5 1LP.

Thog's Masterclass. "Jocelyn came through the fog wall, muttering, her breasts swaying like two angry red eyes looking for a fight." (Greg Benford, *Furious Gulf*, 1994)... "The dictator's wild barbaric eyes danced around the room as though amusing themselves, while the brain behind them thought out some new, and more diabolical scheme." ("Pel Torro," *Formula 29X*, 1963)... "The grey voice of the grey Seaforth glided greyly on to their ears, like a tide of putrescent grey molasses." (*Ibid*, "The Room With the Broken Floor," 1962)... "Wellcome slapped his brow and let his celluloid smile glide across the room." (Esther Friesner, "How to Make Unicorn Pie," *F&SF* 1/99)... *Dept of Feminist Insight*: "That's a load of doggie muffins and you know it," snorted Rusty. 'She's just like any other female. She just acts kinda highbrow sometimes.' (S. D. Howe, "Wrench and Claw," *Analog* 11/98)... "His head was a stone sinking up to the ears between his knees." (Ricardo Pinto, *The Chosen*, 1998)

Thog Lives! On a personal note, I recently enjoyed the vast hospitality of OryCon 20, an sf convention in Portland, Oregon, where the Live Thog's Masterclass Show met its first west-coast audience. People shuddered and cringed most gratifyingly. Of course inept Langford had to complicate things, this time by breaking a front tooth on a rogue Vietnamese water-chestnut just before the convention and thus needing to explore US dentistry for a long session during which I contemplated the healing mantra "I Am Having Root-Canal Work At US Prices." Our very own Lionel Fanthorpe, a much-loved cult figure at OryCons (and admired by Thog for his work as Pel Torro – see above), was to have interviewed me but couldn't make it owing to a clash with TV filming in Turkey. His stand-in interviewer (Geri Sullivan) mercilessly probed the secrets of my small software company's susceptibility to the Millennium Bug, and I heard myself babbling: "On 1 Jan 2000 our *SF Encyclopedia* CD-ROM viewer sprouts an animated paperclip with the face of John Clute..." This may, in fact, not actually be true. Ask me again next millennium.

Living History

Jennifer Swift

The King's Bedchamber took Holly's breath away. Everything seemed to be covered in gold: the hangings around the four-poster bed, the bedclothes themselves, the pilasters, cornices and other woodwork decorating the walls, even the andirons in the black marble fireplace. She realized she was gaping and closed her mouth, trying to look more sophisticated.

"Here the King rose each morning and retired each night in the unfailing ceremonies known as the *lever* and the *coucher*," Monsieur Devaux was explaining to her parents. "Only nobles of the highest birth were permitted to serve the King, and in the evenings they were the ones who handed him his silk nightshirt and gown of gold brocade and lace. His nightcap and handkerchiefs were placed on a cushion of cloth-of-gold."

"Sounds rather complicated," her father, Wade Forrest, said, smiling wryly at the foolishness of people who lived before modern times.

Her mother, Adele, glanced up at the white ostrich plumes which ornamented the top of each bedpost. "He must have wanted people to know that he was very, very important."

Holly wished her parents could rise above the obvious, but M. Devaux did not take offence. "The greatness of the King was thought to represent the greatness of the nation. That was the idea that Louis XIV had when he built this palace and established the traditions, and they were maintained by his successors until the early days of the Revolution."

A gilt balustrade separated the bed from the rest of the room. Holly was tempted to touch its gleaming surface, but she was sure that was not allowed. Now I

understand why there was a revolution, she thought. Aloud she said, "I suppose some people must have criticized the royal family for having a palace like this when so many people in France were living in poverty."

"But it's so beautiful, honey," said her mother, gazing up at the sparkling crystal chandelier over their heads.

"Madame Forrest has put her hand on it," M. Devaux said. Short, plump and balding, he was not Holly's idea of the romantic Frenchman, though he did wear a beautifully cut suit which made her father's look wrinkled and shapeless in comparison. "Without a great concentration of wealth, the splendour of this palace would have been impossible. Of course, taste was also required."

"My daughter's just trying to be fair-minded, Philippe," Wade Forrest said, already edging towards the next room. "Holly's always been a bit of an idealist."

Holly trailed behind her parents and their guide, thinking that all that gold leaf was perhaps not as tasteful as M. Devaux thought. The Frenchman paused in the centre of the next room. "This would be called in English the antechamber of the King's Gentlemen, but it was always known as the *oeil de boeuf*." He pointed to a handsome oval window over the fireplace. Holly noticed it did not look outdoors but rather into the next room. "That means bull's-eye," she explained to her parents.

"I love those children playing," said her mother, pointing to the gilded figures on the cornice which ran around the room at the top of the wall.

"The work of Van Cleve, Hardy and Pouletier, and others," M. Devaux said. "It was here that courtiers lucky to have an *entrée* would wait for the King's rising."

He glanced toward Holly. "Since mademoiselle is interested in such matters, she may like to know that not long before the Revolution a young man threw a book of obscene songs slandering Marie Antoinette through that very window." He shook his head. "The Queen, as an Austrian, was disliked by many members of the nobility."

"Was the young man caught?" Holly asked, shuddering to think what his fate might have been.

"Yes, but he was found to be working for the comte d'Artois, the King's brother, who hoped Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette would not have children and that he would succeed to the throne. Therefore the young man escaped any punishment."

Holly's father chuckled. "Marie Antoinette – wasn't she the one who said about starving peasants that if they didn't have any bread, they should eat cake?"

M. Devaux shook his head firmly. "No, she said nothing like that. It is merely the longest-lived of the slanders against her."

"Why, I think you have a bit of a crush on her, Philippe," Holly's mother said to the Frenchman.

He smiled. "No, it is merely my concern that justice should be done, Adele. And she met her unfair execution most courageously."

As Holly followed her parents and their guide into the next room, she hunted through the scraps of history she had picked up during her French classes. She was pretty sure that Marie Antoinette had helped to bring about her own death by arrogance and double-dealing, but she could not remember enough to challenge Philippe Devaux's version of his country's history.

"This is the first antechamber or *grand couvert*," M. Devaux said, pausing in the middle of the next room. The walls were decorated with melodramatic paintings of battle scenes. "Here the King dined while nobles waited on him. It was a public ceremony and anyone who was decently dressed was allowed to come in and watch their monarch eat."

"How strange!" Holly's father exclaimed.

"It is not so different from people's wish to tour the homes of movie stars today," M. Devaux said, shrugging. "People have always been excited by coming close to celebrity, even in our democratic days. It was Louis XIV's genius to realize that the human desire to be near the famous could be exploited at every level of society from the nobility to commoners. Of course as we shall see later, he did also have private apartments where he could escape from the gaze of the crowd. This is not to mention the smaller palaces of the Trianons in the park here, which his successors came to use more and more." He sounded as if the royal family's desire for privacy, had brought about the Revolution, Holly thought.

They all had to stand back to let a large party of leather-jacketed Italian tourists past. Then M. Devaux led them through a guardroom and past a marble staircase to the Queen's Apartments. They worked their way through another guardroom and two more antechambers, and into the Queen's Bedchamber. "Oh, isn't it gorgeous!" Adele exclaimed.

Holly had to agree with her mother that the pink-and-

white floral silk bedcovers and wall hangings were a refreshing contrast to the heavy magnificence of the King's Bedchamber. "These are exact copies of the brocade Tours silk which Marie Antoinette chose to have put up in this room in 1786," M. Devaux explained. "This was the decoration of the room on the morning of the sixth of October, 1789, when a revolutionary mob forced the royal family to leave Versailles for ever and take up residence in Paris."

"Marie Antoinette was obviously a woman with exquisite taste," Holly's mother said.

Their guide smiled proprietorially. "Yes, certainly. There are even better memorials of her discrimination in the Petit Trianon, the small palace her husband gave her for her exclusive use, and especially in the gardens of that palace. Her landscape garden in the English style is stunning."

"Didn't she have a charming little village built in that garden?" Adele asked. "I'm sure I saw a picture of it in the guidebook."

He nodded. "Ah yes, the Hameau. It was built to increase the illusion that one was in the countryside, not in a park."

"I'm really looking forward to seeing that," Adele said, and turned to her husband. "You should come too, dear. It might lead to ideas for a new line." Holly's father was an executive in a firm that made toys; M. Devaux was one of the directors of their new French subsidiary.

But it was the middle of the afternoon before they finished going through the palace. Then it was necessary to go to the cafeteria for a late lunch. Holly could tell her father was rather shocked when he cut into his steak and discovered it was still pink on the inside even though she had ordered it *bien cuit*, well done. But he said nothing, and diverted the conversation from history to business. "That fire in China's created one mighty big hassle for us, Philippe."

M. Devaux cut into his fish. "I'm afraid you are right, Wade."

"All the Karri Jayne line went up in smoke, and so we couldn't resupply the retailers for the end of the Christmas peak."

Holly's mother frowned at her father; evidently she thought M. Devaux might object to discussing business over a meal, but her father ignored her.

"Yes, and nearly 200 young women have lost their lives, which is very sad. They say it was one of the worst factory fires in history." Then noticing that Holly's glass was empty, the Frenchman added, "Permit me, mademoiselle," and refilled it with more crisp sauterne.

Wade Forrest's face turned a slightly darker shade of pink. "Philippe, it's hardly our fault if the subcontractors ignore their own country's fire regulations." He laid down his knife and fork, apparently abandoning his steak. "The problem is there's so much bribery and corruption in countries like that, paying safety inspectors to look the other way and not putting in sprinkler systems."

"I understand that most of the doors and windows were locked, and that there had been no fire drills," M.

Devaux said as he deftly removed the last piece of flesh from the skeleton of his fish.

Holly thought of the Porters, a family who had arrived shortly before Christmas at the centre for the homeless run by her campus church where she did voluntary work. Their little girl had refused to let go of her teddy bear even though its right side had been singed black by the fire that had destroyed the family's house and virtually all their possessions. About half of Holly's *salade niçoise* was glittering oleaginous on her plate, but she was no longer hungry.

"Yeah, and do you know some crazy group's trying to blame Toyco for the fire, Philippe?" said her father. "They're overlooking the safety code that we put in when we signed with the subcontractors. How were we to know that those people would then subcontract with someone else and leave the code out? And these busybodies don't seem to take into account that we're facing serious competition from companies with no safety code at all – we have to keep our prices down or those competitors will wipe us out."

"And it certainly wouldn't help the employees if they all lost their jobs," Holly's mother said, apparently deciding that M. Devaux was not offended by mixing food and business. She taught economics and business studies at a local high school. "People in those countries don't have the luxury we have in the West of being paid for not working. And if you ask me, that makes a lot more sense than the way we arrange things here."

"Yeah," said Holly's father, letting M. Devaux pour the last of the wine into his glass. I've been to some of our subcontractors' factories in Thailand and China, and I can tell you the women who work in them are happy to have jobs, even if it means working eleven-hour days." Holly wondered how many Karri Jayne dolls you could sew pairs of eyes on if you worked for eleven hours. The really daunting thought was having to come back the next morning and do it all over again.

"And we still need to decide how we are going to replace the products destroyed in that terrible fire," M. Devaux said, placing his cutlery neatly across his empty plate.

Adele looked up from her *tourte Lorraine*. "Of course it's very sad that all those young women died, but it could be argued that if working and safety conditions were the same in Asia as in the West, then fewer people would benefit from having jobs. It's like, say, homelessness – one reason there are more people wandering the streets than before, even in America, is that burdensome regulations have made housing too expensive for the really poor." Holly noticed that her mother's eyes were shining as they always did when she believed when she was saying something provocative but correct.

M. Devaux pursed his lips. "Surely it is unemployment which is the real –"

Her father pushed his chair away from the table. "Excuse me, Philippe, but shouldn't I get us all some coffee?" Her father was never comfortable when people disagreed, Holly thought. "I'll help you, Dad," she said, getting to her feet. I know I should try to tell Mama about the homeless people I've met, Holly thought, but

I'm afraid she wouldn't listen.

When she and her father returned to the table, M. Devaux and her mother were discussing Marie Antoinette again. "It is true that when she was in her teens and early 20s, she was frivolous and extravagant," the Frenchman was saying. "However, after her children were born, she became more serious and less fond of spending money. Unfortunately, by then the damage was done, and she had acquired a bad reputation that lingers to this day."

Adele peeled the paper off a sugar cube and dropped the sugar into her coffee. "Isn't it possible the French Revolution would have had a different outcome if she'd been a different sort of person?"

M. Devaux paused in the act of raising his coffee cup to his lips. "Some historians think that France might have become a constitutional monarchy like Britain if only Marie Antoinette had not set the King, who was very much under her influence, against compromising with reformers."

"What a shame it didn't work out that way," said Adele, shaking her head. Holly wondered if her mother was thinking of their vacation in England the year before, when her mother had been much impressed by the way the Queen functioned as a symbol of national identity and tradition.

Wade Forrest glanced at his watch. "Ladies, I'm afraid Philippe and I are going to have to resolve a few details that weren't settled in our meeting yesterday. I'm sorry about that, but since we're flying home tomorrow, it's our last chance to do it face to face. Perhaps there are still some things for you to see –"

Holly's mother pushed her chair back. "There certainly are," she said, to Holly's relief. "I can understand that you two need to finish discussing the aftermath of the fire, but I'm determined to see that garden of Marie Antoinette's before it gets completely dark outside. How about you, Holly?"

"Oh sure, Mom." Holly got to her feet, glancing out the cafeteria's windows. The sky was overcast and dull. She zipped up her parka. It was going to be cold out there.

Outside, they paused at the top of the flight of steps behind the Château. Before them was a magnificent view: a series of terraces ornamented with fountains leading down to a grassy avenue lined with tall, straight trees. At the end of the avenue was the vast cross of the Grand Canal, its still water grey under the twilit sky of late afternoon. Beyond the Canal were wooded hills, the bare branches of their trees making a precise filigree against the slate-coloured sky. "The Park's enormous, isn't it?" her mother asked. Then looking into her handbag, she said, "Oh drat, I must have left the guidebook with your father in the cafeteria."

"I think I remember where the Petit Trianon is," Holly said. "I studied the map while we were standing in line to buy tickets. Do you see the right arm of the Grand Canal? Both Trianons are somewhere near the end of it."

Her mother nodded. "I'll trust your memory, dear. We don't want to waste any more time going back and get-

ting the book."

They went down the steps and made their way along the grassy avenue of the *Tapis vert*. It was lined with pedestals supporting giant urns and various statuary, covered with green canvas to protect them from the winter's cold. At the end of the avenue in a large, semi-circular pool a bronze Apollo urged his horses up out of the water. Other tourists could be seen in the Park, in twos and threes, making their way down the paths in the distance, but it was very quiet after the bustle in the Château. It must be empty because it's cold, Holly thought, though it was in fact considerably warmer than early January in Chicago. She balled her hands into the pockets of her jacket and hurried after her mother, who was walking fast as she generally did.

They passed Apollo's Fountain, then followed the Grand Canal. But when they reached the end of its right arm, Holly was no longer so sure of the way. Her mother pointed to an elegant stone building on the left, just visible through the trees. "Now is that the little Trianon palace?"

Holly squinted. "No, that must be the big one. See all those pink marble columns on its walls? But I remember the Petit Trianon is near it."

As they went past the blue-and-gold-painted wrought-iron gates of the Grand Trianon, her mother said, "I wish we'd finished lunch sooner. Then we might have had a chance to see this. I remember reading that Napoleon lived there for a time."

"There's far too much to see in one day," Holly commented. She stopped, hesitating. The broad gravel avenue continued in front of them, but she turned towards a much smaller path leading into the trees. "I think the Petit Trianon is this way." As her mother followed her, she said, "All the paths here are curving because that's one of the principles of an English landscape garden. You're supposed to be continually surprised as you go around corners and see new things."

"It does make it hard to know where you're going, though," her mother replied. They were passing less grand buildings now, houses and barns with grey stucco walls. Holly supposed they were for the use of the gardeners and other maintenance workers. She frowned. Was she getting a headache? No, it wasn't that her head hurt, but there was something odd about this place. She felt as if they were being watched, though there was no one else in sight. She pointed to a narrow cobbled path leading between steep earthen banks. "See that sign that says 'Chemin Creux'? I'm pretty sure that leads to where we want to go."

Tall yew trees overshadowed the path and Holly hunched her shoulders inside her parka. The feeling of oppression was stronger here, though perhaps that was just because the trees prevented anything from growing under them and the sight of their twisting roots on the bare soil was somehow disturbing. She hurried on, for once almost outdistancing her mother.

They came out into a small clearing with several paths leading from it. They were surrounded by open woodland. The path to the left led to a small white building consisting of some columns roofed over; Adele

pointed to it. "Surely that's not the Petit Trianon."

Holly shook her head. "It must be a sort of summer-house for the gardens." She noticed a man sitting on a bench next to it, the first person she had seen since they had left the broad avenue by the Grand Trianon. He was romantically dressed in a big dark cape, which he wore closely wrapped around his body, and a broad-brimmed dark hat was pulled low over his eyes. The ground around him was covered with coarse grass and scattered dead leaves. At first Holly thought the man attractive, but when he turned and looked in her direction, she saw he had heavy, pock-marked features and a sneering expression. Though he did not seem to take any notice of her, Holly, decided she definitely did not want to go in his direction. "I'm sure we're very near the palace," she said, trying to keep the anxiety provoked by the sight of the man out of her voice.

"Shall we go to the right?" her mother asked, perhaps sharing her daughter's reaction. Holly glanced down the other paths, hoping to see a clue to the palace's location or someone other than the unpleasant man she could ask for directions, but there was no one in sight. "I don't see why not," she said, and turned towards the right-hand path.

The path took them to a small wooden bridge over a ravine. Beside the bridge was an artificial cliff built of large rocks. A waterfall trickled down it and disappeared below their feet. The cascade was so close that Holly could have reached out and cupped the water in her hand. There was a heavy, damp smell as if stagnant water was not far off. They went down another tree-lined path and then walked alongside a narrow meadow hemmed in by trees. There was something inexpressibly sad about the shut-in look of the place.

"That's it, honey!" Her mother was pointing at a square stone building just visible through the trees.

Holly was surprised to see the Petit Trianon was no bigger than many of the country houses she had toured with her family in England the year before. It was built of pale yellowish stone and had elegantly proportioned columns and tall narrow windows. As they came onto the gravelled terrace beside the Trianon, Holly saw the windows were shuttered. "It might not be open to visitors now," she said to her mother.

Adele's face looked drawn as if she were also feeling depressed. "Yes, it's too late – they must have closed up for the night. I do wish we hadn't wasted so much time in the restaurant, but your father is such a slow eater and I know French people are offended if you rush them over their food."

Her mother's annoyance irritated Holly. She wished she too had stayed in the cafeteria so that now she could be relaxing over a cup of tea and a slice of *tarte citron*. There had been no point in walking all the way out here. Winter was not the right time to visit a garden, especially when it was almost dark. Perhaps it was because there was so little light that the Petit Trianon and the trees looked curiously flat and two-dimensional, like the country scene in the tapestry kit she had been embroidering on the flight over. "Oh, Mama, let's go back."

But her mother was now pointing off in the distance

again, away from the Trianon and towards some small buildings just visible beyond a meadow and through an open grove. "I think that's where the Queen's village is, but I wonder how to get there."

At that moment a door slammed and they heard the sound of running footsteps on the gravel of the terrace. Holly looked back and saw a man coming around the corner of the Trianon towards them. She was momentarily puzzled that he should be running, but reassured by his appearance. He was tall, with curly black hair and a handsome face, ruddy with exertion. Like the man by the garden house he wore a broad-brimmed dark hat and a cape, though unlike the man he was smiling. "*Mesdames, Mesdames,*" he said. "*Il faut passer par là.*" He pointed to a path winding through the meadow, gesturing vigorously with his arm. "*Par ici... cherchez le Hameau.*" Holly noticed his shoes had large metal buckles. Perhaps he and the other man are in a film, she thought, though she had seen no lights or cameras.

"What's he saying, dear?" her mother asked. "Does he want us to go right?"

Holly nodded. The man was speaking again, but this time too rapidly for her to follow. When he stopped, she smiled as if she had understood and said, "*Merci, monsieur.*" He smiled with what struck her as a peculiar mixture of amusement and superiority. She turned to her mother. "He says the village is down that path." She glanced back and was surprised to see the man had already disappeared, presumably back around the corner of the building though she had not heard his feet on the gravel. She shook her head, partly to clear it because the odd feeling of being closed in had not gone away, and led her mother through the meadow.

"I wonder who that man was," Adele said. "He seemed in an awful hurry, and there was something odd about his clothes."

"Wasn't he good-looking, though?" Holly trailed after her mother, wondering if her fatigue was due to excessive tourism. The path went through an open grove and then crossed a stone bridge over a stream. As they drew closer to the Hameau, she realized why the roofs of some of the houses were curiously rounded – they were thatched. The six or seven buildings were grouped around a small lake, and the rising mist made them soft and indistinct even though they were now quite close. Their walls were of plaster or brick; each building had a wooden porch or a balcony or both, and no window seemed without a flower box, though there were no plants in them at the moment.

"Oh, aren't they, *cute!*" her mother said in an irritatingly gushing tone. Holly was about to say something cutting, but then she realized her mother was absolutely right. The houses were almost aggressively charming. Perhaps that's why they looked strangely modern, even though they must have been meant to seem old-fashioned even 200 years ago. It was not simply because they were in excellent repair – you could tell that the occasional cracks in the plaster were artificial, put there to increase their rustic appearance – but also because the effect was so calculated. Her mother pointed to a

mill across the lake, complete with a wooden water wheel. "Can't you see that as a dolls' house with some tiny bears who are the miller and his family?"

Suddenly Holly was able to put her finger on the source of the *déjà vu* the Hameau aroused in her – it was remarkably like an 18th-century version of Disneyland. "I guess people have always wanted to escape into fantasies," she murmured under her breath as she followed her mother towards a pair of cottages joined by a long two-storey veranda. A window in the ground floor of the cottage on the right was lit and the shutters were open. Holly stepped beside her mother and peered in.

Her mouth fell open in surprise. Inside the cottage was an elegant drawing room which would not have been out of place in the Château. Crystal chandeliers illuminated a room whose panelled walls were ornamented with gilt carving. Handsome chairs and small tables were placed around the sides of the room, but Holly's attention was riveted by the figure in the middle of the room. It was a woman standing with her back to them, wearing a white cotton dress whose full skirt swept the floor. Over her shoulders the woman wore a pale green triangular shawl edged with gold. What a lovely costume, Holly thought.

"There aren't any cameras, so I doubt someone's making a film," her mother whispered. "I think they must be doing the 'living history' approach here, you know, with guides playing historical characters." But why wasn't there any notice of that on a sign as we came in, Holly wondered. Still, she thought, Mama's probably right. Those two men in the park could also have –

"I bet this lady's supposed to be Marie Antoinette," her mother said, slightly louder.

At this point the woman in the centre of the room turned towards them. Her dress had a deep décolleté partially concealed by the scarf, but Holly, was particularly struck by her face. It was long and pale with striking dark blue eyes. She had masses of soft fluffy blonde hair which she wore full about her face. She was reading a letter which she held in her hand.

"See," Adele said, "they've made up her lace and hair to look like that painting of the Queen that M. Devaux showed us in the Château."

But the skin on the back of Holly's neck prickled as she suddenly remembered something one of her French teachers had told the class. "Mama, there's another possible explanation for this. Two Englishwomen visited Versailles at the turn of the century and thought they saw the ghost of Marie Antoinette." Though Holly kept her voice low – the woman inside did not appear to have noticed them and Holly, wanted to keep it that way – she tried to keep her tone jocular. Surely, the woman before them was as solid and fleshly as they were.

"How interesting," her mother whispered. "Wouldn't it be fascinating if this was really her spirit and not some history student in costume?"

Holly frowned as she tried to recall the details of the story. "Actually, Mama, they thought they'd stepped back in time. They saw a lady sitting on the grass outside the Petit Trianon and sketching, and they later thought that she must have been the Queen, though

they didn't speak to her."

"What a shame," said Adele, now speaking in a normal tone. "If I saw Marie Antoinette, I'd have a lot to say to her."

The woman suddenly looked up. She put down her letter on an elegant writing desk and came towards the window, moving with a graceful, gliding walk. Holly felt her face grow hot. She was afraid of two things: first, that she and her mother were not supposed to be there at all because this was a project for visiting schoolchildren, and second, that this woman might speak too rapidly for Holly to understand her. This visit had taught her that three years of high-school French, plus one in college, did not prepare you for unpredictable real-life conversations. Now the woman was at the window, frowning slightly as she peered through the panes of glass at them.

"Perhaps we ought to leave —" Adele began, but the woman inside had unlatched the window and was swinging it open. Holly caught a whiff of perfume and heard the rustle of the woman's dress. "*Mais qui donc Étes vous?*" the woman asked coldly.

For all that Holly's parka and jeans had designer labels, she suddenly felt that her clothes were vulgar, inappropriate for the dignified surroundings of Versailles. At least her mother was better dressed, in a well-cut cranberry wool coat and knee-length leather boots. "*Pardonnez-nous, madame,*" Holly said in a slightly unsteady voice. "*Nous sommes touristes.*"

Her mother seemed less intimidated by the woman. She smiled graciously at her and inclined her head in a small bow, then turned to Holly. "Ask her who she is," she whispered.

"You are... English?" They were surprised to hear the woman speaking English. Her accent was strong, but the words were clear.

"We're American, actually," Holly said.

The woman's eyebrows arched. Had she not seen it for herself, Holly would not have imagined it was possible to look so elegantly disdainful. She instantly felt twice as grubby and resented the feeling.

"And who are you, madam?" her mother asked, apparently oblivious to the woman's haughtiness.

"*Je suis la Reine, bien sûr,*" the woman said, coolly amused. "I am the Queen, surely," she added.

She's got to be putting us on, Holly told herself. It wasn't very nice of the authorities not to warn us that there were guides in costume about. Still, she could not stop herself wondering what would happen if she tried to touch the woman — would Holly's hand pass right through her?

But her mother did not seem the least put out. "Pleased to meet you, Your Majesty," she said, surprising Holly by executing a slight but graceful curtsy. "I'm Mrs Adele Forrest of Chicago, Illinois, and this is my daughter, Miss Holly Forrest."

Holly's face was burning with embarrassment and it did not help that she knew it. But her mother continued unabated. "Would you mind if we came in and had a look at your charming house?"

The Queen inclined her head a few millimetres. "If

you wish," she said.

As Holly followed her mother over to the door, she whispered fiercely, "This is probably a set-up, you know." Her anger stemmed largely from her fear that it was not.

"Yes, but why not play along?" her mother said, tossing her head as if she were the 20-year-old.

As they stepped indoors, Holly glanced about for signs that they were in the 20th century. But the room was dimly lit because the only light came from a fire burning on the hearth and from the candles in the chandelier and wall sconces. She and her mother were standing next to the desk where the Queen had left her letter; Holly caught the date out of the corner of her eye: *le 8 septembre 1789*. But it isn't summer outside, she thought, then realized that 1789 was the first year of the French Revolution and that the date was only a month before a mob compelled the royal family to leave Versailles. Meanwhile her mother was exclaiming, "Really, we're very honoured, Your Majesty. This is exquisite."

It was distinctly warmer inside the room than out of doors, though it was hard to believe this was due to the small fire at the end of the room. Holly unzipped her parka, and the Queen looked startled at the sound. However, she seated herself in a chair, looked away from her visitors, and produced a fan. Clearly, she wanted them to know that their presence was tolerated rather than welcomed. Holly thought of something else M. Devaux had mentioned: a few months before the royal family left Versailles, the public was for the first time allowed to penetrate Marie Antoinette's private realm of the Petit Trianon and its gardens. Many visitors had been disappointed to find that the buildings were not plated with gold and encrusted with diamonds, as rumour had had it. This room itself was as tasteful as her mother had said, but the furniture was scratched here and there, the gilding faded, the upholstery had loose threads and there was an ink stain on the delicate inlaid wooden surface of the Queen's writing desk. Very clever, Holly thought, not to leave the reproductions in mint condition, as they are up in the Palace, but to use them. Still, she felt a chill brush the back of her neck again: unlike any museum reconstruction she had ever seen, this room really did look as if it were lived in.

Her mother was tugging at her sleeve. "Darling," Adele whispered, "I need your help. I'm going to tell her something but it's a complicated idea, so you may need to translate."

"Tell her what?" The room and the woman in it were giving Holly the creeps, and she just wanted to make their excuses and leave.

"About the Revolution, of course."

"Oh Mama, can't we go away? My head hurts."

"I'm sorry to hear that, but" — her mother pulled her close and spoke softly in Holly's ear — "I think this arrangement's rather fun. It really brings history alive, doesn't it?"

Holly glanced at the woman sitting across the room. The Queen, for Holly could not stop calling her that, was fanning herself, her head turned away from them.

Though her neck was mostly hidden by her hair, Holly could just see its graceful curve. She could not stop herself thinking of a blade speeding down on that neck, and she suddenly felt sick to her stomach. But her mother was already speaking to the woman: "Your Majesty, I want to tell you that we come from the future."

That did secure the Queen's attention. She swung back to look at them and her fan stopped moving. "Your clothes are strange," she said grudgingly, pronouncing clothes as *clothe is*.

"We're from about 200 years in the future. That's why we're dressed this way. I hope you believe me because I have something very important to say."

The Queen pursed her lips. "How can I trust that you tell the truth?"

"Remember what I say and see if it doesn't become true," Adele replied. "First, there's going to be a revolution."

The Queen's fan fluttered once or twice. "Yes. It has already happened. *La noblesse* have resigned their privileges." She did not look very pleased about it, Holly, thought. Perhaps she did not like the example they had set for the monarchy.

"No, the second point is that the revolution will continue. It's going to become violent – Your Majesty, I have to warn you that lives are in danger, including your husband's and yours as well."

The Queen snapped her fan shut and raised her chin, her expression glacially dignified. Marie Antoinette, thought Holly, maybe this really is her – she must have looked like this when she faced the mob.

The Queen's regal disdain seemed to jar her mother. Adele hesitated before she continued: "But things don't have to turn out that way, Your Majesty. You can avoid the whole tragedy if only you remember this – the age of absolutism is over. Democracy is going to become stronger and stronger." The Queen's face looked as if Holly's mother had broken wind. "So what you and your husband have to do is compromise with your opposition. Accept that there have to be limitations to royal power, and let France become a constitutional monarchy like England. If you don't do this, your country will soon become a republic."

The Queen's lips twisted in a mow of distaste. She rose to her feet. "I see you are a madwoman. Leave or I will call my guards."

Adele's lace turned red. "You're supposed to argue with me, not resort to force! Don't you see that there's no way the King can be the only political power in the land?"

The Queen's eyebrows arched. "It is only because of the problem with the finances. Once we have money again, we will rule, as God has intended."

She said this more to herself than to them – perhaps they seemed like a dream to her – and the absolute confidence of her tone chilled Holly. She summoned her courage and spoke aloud, "Please, Your Majesty, my mother's right. The only way to save yourself is to compromise."

The Queen laughed. The sound was startlingly loud in the quiet room. "The girl is mad also. Perhaps it is

because of your revolution in America, which I have always thought insane." She turned her blue eyes on Holly. So powerful was her glance that Holly almost immediately lowered hers. "Have you not seen, child, the might and splendour of the *palais* of the King? This is a time of difficulty, but it is temporary." There was a rattle as she opened her fan. "Even our enemies admit France cannot survive without a king."

Holly looked up again. "But what about right and wrong, Your Majesty? Shouldn't the poor people in France be treated more justly?"

"Oh, as for them, it is *la noblesse* who are their enemies, not us." She inclined her head gracefully. "It is to my husband and myself that the poor turn for help." There was the sound of footsteps outside the door across the room. The guards, Holly thought. If we really are in the 18th century, could we get trapped?

Adele opened her mouth to reply to the Queen, but Holly seized her mother's arm. "Mama, we aren't getting anywhere. I think we'd better leave." She added in a whisper, "We've got to get out of here while we can."

Her mother frowned, then nodded. "There's no point in continuing this conversation." She sketched a curtsey, to the Queen. "Goodbye, Your Majesty. Please don't forget what we've said." Then, greatly to Holly's relief and just as the knob on the opposite door was turning, they stepped back outside, and Holly closed the door. She was still holding her mother's arm and she could feel the older woman trembling. "I didn't care for that woman at all," her mother said. "If her behaviour was meant to be educational, then I think we should make an official complaint to the French government."

Holly pointed to the window where they had first peered in – it was completely dark. "They've turned off the lights," her mother said, "because the tourists have left." But her voice had dropped to a whisper.

"But how can you blow out a lot of candles all at the same time?" Holly whispered back. They crept over to the window and peeked in once more. Holly was terribly afraid of meeting the Queen's face, but what she saw was even more frightening – there was enough dim twilight shining into the room to reveal it was empty. Not only was no one in it; all the furniture, which had been there less than a minute ago, was gone. Both women gasped.

Neither of them spoke until they were well away from the Hameau. "I wish it wasn't so dark," Holly said as they crossed the stone bridge again. "It's getting hard to see the way." She realized she was shivering, and she knew it was not from the cold.

"I had a headache too when I was in that house," her mother said. "I think we had a shared hallucination."

"Yes, I suppose that's possible. But don't you think –"

"It must have been that shellfish we had for dinner last night." Her mother walked so fast Holly had to struggle to keep up with her. They were drawing close to the Petit Trianon. The windows which had been shuttered before were open now and light was spilling out. People were moving around inside. Holly felt a moment of terror before she realized that the figures at the win-

dow were three young Japanese women, dressed in vinyl jackets, their faces creased with giggles. Thank God, she thought.

She followed her mother back to the Château. It did not seem to take much time before they were climbing the steps by the fountains again. Adele said nothing until they were outside the cafeteria. "There's no need to worry your father about what happened, and I wouldn't want M. Devaux to laugh at us."

"No, Mama."

Later, as they were crossing the great cobbled yard in front of the Château, Holly's father asked, "Well ladies, how was Marie Antoinette's little village? Do you think we could make a line of it?"

Even in the dark, Holly could see her mother shudder. "It was pretty, dear, but too old-fashioned. It wasn't really appropriate for modern children. Have you and Philippe settled the problems over the fire?"

M. Devaux answered. "Yes, Wade has told me about a factory he's visited in China. The management told him the workers can be put on 24 days until the production shortfall is made up."

"I hope that doesn't lead to any further trouble with that group that blamed Toyco for the fire," Adele said.

Holly's father shrugged. "The long hours will only be for a couple weeks or so if the manager was telling the truth about their productivity. I'm sure the girls will be glad of the work. Anyway, the trade unions in China aren't going to give us any problems, and the govern-

ment there is desperate for Western business, so we're in the driver's seat."

"But will we always be?" Holly asked. Her parents looked back at her in surprise; they were not used to her questioning their views. "And isn't it a matter of sharing what we have now, before it's too late?"

Her father laughed. "Honey, it's the people who run the government over there who are the real exploiters. They're the ones who ought to be enforcing their country's safety regulations, and we can't be held responsible for conditions in factories we don't own."

"And we're helping them by giving them work," said her mother. "Your father says that there are always more applicants than jobs."

Holly did not try to answer that. She fell behind the others, and then glanced back at the statue of Louis XIV on horseback, a magnificent, swaggering sculpture. He would never have guessed that within 80 years of his death the French monarchy would fall. She shivered, and walked faster, afraid the gate might close on her if she did not hurry.

Jennifer Swift is an American by background, who lives in Oxford, England. The above is her fourth story for *Interzone*, following "As We Forgive Our Debtors" (issue 72), "Man, Born of Woman" (issue 97) and "Bright, Bright as Day" (issue 125). She has also had a few stories in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and elsewhere, and has completed a first novel.

THE THIRD ALTERNATIVE

ISSUE 17 OUT NOW

SPECIAL OFFER TO INTERZONE READERS: FREE EXTRA ISSUE TO ALL NEW SUBSCRIBERS!

extraordinary new fiction
STEVE RASNIC TEM
JEFF VANDERMEER
ROBERTA MURPHY
CONRAD WILLIAMS
JOEL LANE
JASON FROWLEY
ALEXANDER GLASS

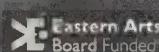
interview
CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

profile
KURT VONNEGUT

cinema
DAVID LYNCH

stunning artwork
free books

A4, colour, 60 glossy pages
£3 or £11 four issues from TIA Press
5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB
<http://members.aol.com/ttaldyer/index.htm>



Janeeways and Thaneeways

The Better Half, and Worse Half, of Science-Fiction Television

Gary Westfahl

CONSUMER WARNING: *this column will present, in a naïve and exploratory manner, observations and hypotheses that some may regard as sexist – though I will limit myself to the form of sexism occasionally acceptable to the politically correct, that which validates and celebrates women.*

A while ago, when I attempted to write a column about science-fiction television, the project collapsed for one reason: despite the inarguable quantity and arguable quality of contemporary science-fiction programmes, I rarely if ever could bring myself to watch them, and, given my lifelong enthusiasm for the genre, I could not begin to understand why.

It was therefore strange and fortuitous when organizers of the 1998 LOSCON (Los Angeles Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention) for some reason assigned me to a panel on "Nineties Science Fiction on TV – Trend or Menace?" I expected only to make a brief opening statement about my inexplicable lack of interest in the field, hear a few dissenting words from passionate defenders of one programme or another, and yield the microphone to the other loudmouths on the panel, who might say something enlightening.

There were, as it turns out, no other loudmouths on the panel – in fact, there was only one additional



Star Trek: Voyager – Kate Mulgrew plays Captain Kathryn Janeway

panellist, who didn't seem anxious to say very much at all. Without very much to say myself, I opened up the discussion to an audience that was eager to talk about science-fiction television and, surprisingly, often seemed to dislike it more than I did.

A sampling of their disparaging comments: science-fiction television is

not really science fiction, displays no intelligence, doesn't make you think, ignores modern scientific ideas, is negative and fearful rather than positive and hopeful, reflects the short-sighted stupidity of television executives, and now serves only as an expression of popular mythology and "family values." The most striking criticism: whereas older shows like *Star Trek* attracted young people to science-fiction fandom, modern programmes have their own support groups to draw in their devoted viewers; instead of strengthening fandom, then, science-fiction television now weakens fandom. As my guest Paul Barnett laughingly observed, the complaint was absurdly parochial – but also keenly revelatory, as it allowed me to epitomize all of these fans' grievances in one sentence: science-fiction television is not ours.

Science-fiction television is not driven by the principles and conventions of written science fiction, is not influenced by the science-fiction community, is not created by science-fiction writers, and is not produced for science-fiction readers. Science-fiction television thrives in its own universe, increasingly dominating the scene and drawing attention away from written science fiction. And members of traditional fandom can do nothing about it except to resent it.

As today's scholars endlessly note,

wherever there are issues of power and powerlessness, of dominance and subservience, another issue is usually involved, that of gender.

When first pondering my reactions to science-fiction television, I considered one clue: there was one programme which, if I stumbled onto it, usually kept my fingers off the remote control – *Star Trek: Voyager*. Why did this programme, and this programme alone, appeal to me? The flippant explanation was that I found it enjoyable, for the first time since the 1960s, to see a *Star Trek* starship under capable feminine control – because I have argued in print, undoubtedly like many others, that the original *Star Trek* was structured like a romance novel, with Captain Kirk playing the wilful, impetuous heroine torn between the comforting boy next door (Dr McCoy) and the dark, mysterious stranger (Mr Spock).

Even putting this particular theory aside, one can discern something archetypically *feminine* in the priorities that Kirk consistently displayed: he wanted to *communicate* with all alien races in the galaxy, to *share his feelings* with them, as it were; he wanted to *explain what "love"* is to baffled aliens; he argued with Spock about the primacy of *emotion* over *logic*; and he repeatedly violated the sacrosanct “Prime Directive” because he felt compelled to *help others in distress*. Travelling through unexplored regions of space, he always sought to interact with newly discovered races in an egalitarian, non-hierarchical, and reassuring fashion; “let’s be friends” was his message, even to the aliens who greeted him with threats or violence. And Captain Janeway, in her lonely quest through sectors of space far from the Federation, visibly shares these admirable tendencies.

In contrast, the other two *Star Trek* series – *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* – had male, and thoroughly masculine, captains manifesting radically different priorities. Operating in realms dominated by their ubiquitous Federation, Captains Picard and Sisko functioned as middle-level managers in the grand, hierarchical Federation bureaucracy, charged with carrying out its policies and imposing its will upon any recalcitrant pockets of space resisting its benevolent wisdom. “Exploring strange new worlds,” whenever they were obliged to do so, was typically regarded only as a nuisance, something disturbing their orderly routines; in response to unusual situations, they sat in their peripatetic offices, consulted the regulations, or contacted a higher-up for guidance. Then, with humourless pomposity, these men in

“...isn’t science fiction regularly condemned as the quintessentially masculine genre...”

their gray flannel spacesuits dutifully implemented the mandated solution, only rarely exhibiting any passion or personality.

If you question my description of the essential femininity of Kirk, watch the episode “Turnabout Intruder,” in which Kirk’s body is taken over by the mind of a vengeful woman, and notice that, portraying this emotionally volatile female, *William Shatner acts exactly the same way that he always does*. Similarly, if you disagree with my description of the dull, domineering masculinity of Picard, watch the episode “The Best of Both Worlds,” observe him absorbed by and carrying out the commands of the collective alien Borg, and notice that, portraying this soulless bureaucratic minion, *Patrick Stewart acts exactly the same way that he always does*.

So, as the governing presence in science-fiction television shifted from female to male, from Jane to thane, the fans who had previously embraced the reassuringly familiar, feminine aura of *Star Trek* grew alienated by the burgeoning masculinity of more recent programmes.

What’s this, you say, about “the reassuringly familiar, feminine aura” of science fiction? After all, isn’t science fiction regularly condemned as the quintessentially masculine genre, long written almost exclusively by and for young men, filled with muscle-bound

macho heroes swaggering and bullying their way through the galaxy?

Actually, for those who can look beyond the predominantly male casts and purportedly phallic spaceships, this is not what earlier science fiction was like at all.

The argument resists rigorous proof, but I am currently reading through E. F. Bleiler’s massive *Science Fiction: The Gernsback Years*, which summarizes every science-fiction story published in a genre magazine between 1926 and 1936, and I suspect you will find therein more soulmates to warm, empathetic Captain Kirk than to John Wayne or Rambo. Spacemen progressing through the cosmos were more likely to form alliances with other races than battle them, unless of course they attacked us first; concerns about communicating with and understanding aliens were just as common as the us-versus-them mentality; strong female characters were not unusual, and there were even a few women writers, like Leslie F. Stone, churning out space operas with the best of them.

Why should this be, given the undeniable fact that most of the writers and readers were male? Well, the young nerds attracted to science fiction may have shared the gender and skin colour of the era’s dominant class, but in every other way they were alienated and marginalized members of society, dreaming of domed cities and Martian canals when most people longed for an idealized domestic past and idolized Gene Autry and Andy Hardy. If, at that time, you read magazines with pictures of squid-like monsters and built miniature rockets in your backyard, you undoubtedly felt rejected, ridiculed, and out of place. Such people often bond with, and adopt the attitudes of, other members of society who feel rejected, ridiculed, and out of place. By this logic, one would expect to find in early science-fiction stories passionate arguments against prejudice and racism, celebrations of oppressed workers struggling against evil bosses, and proto-feminist tracts applauding the abilities and sentiments of women. And if you look carefully, you will find, in the science fiction of the 1930s and thereafter, numerous examples of all of the above.

So it was that science-fiction fans, representing a literature born from and still reflecting the philosophy of society’s downtrodden classes, including women, responded so strongly to the original *Star Trek*, part of what was then another genre of the oppressed, science-fiction television. In the 1950s and 1960s, programmes in that category were viewed solely as

fodder for children or evanescent novelties; in such an atmosphere, Gene Roddenberry dared dream only that his genuinely science-fictional *Star Trek* might last as long as five years. Unwanted, misunderstood, and constantly on the verge of cancellation, *Star Trek* naturally became a programme that sided with the oppressed, espoused alliances with other outsiders, and came to embody attitudes traditionally associated with women. Then, science-fiction fans previously repelled by the robotic masculine hubris of travesties like Irwin Allen's *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* found the feminine sensibility of *Star Trek* uniquely recognizable and appealing.

Unfortunately, *Star Trek* eventually became popular, far more popular than written science fiction, and success often makes you smug and self-satisfied, inclined to sympathize more with your fellow millionaires than the bohemians you once befriended, more like one of the boys than one of the girls. Hence, asked to create a new *Star Trek* after 20 years of adulation and swelling profits, Roddenberry crafted *Star Trek: The Next Generation* which, despite its cosmetic gestures towards feminist concerns (changing "no man" to "no one" in the opening narration, replacing miniskirts with pants), soon evolved into an odiously arrogant and thoroughly masculine programme (and it was odiously racist as well, far more than the original series, but a scholar named Daniel Bernardi has already argued that case). And one can make similar claims about *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and other science-fiction television programmes of the 1990s.

How did *Star Trek: Voyager* escape this fate? Surely, the fortuitous tokenism of its female commander, and the influence of its female co-creator and executive producer Jeri Tay-

lor, helped to steer the show in a better direction. Also, unlike the other second-generation *Star Trek* series, independent kingdoms in the syndication market, the fortunes of *Star Trek: Voyager* were from the onset tied to those of the tiny, upstart UPN network, continually struggling to compete against the larger American networks, so that the programme may have instinctively resisted the bourgeois complacency of its compatriots and instead aligned itself with society's marginalized classes.

(The irony here is that *Star Trek: Voyager*, an overt expression of the wise and nurturing feminine approach, has been attacked as "sexist" because of one addition to the cast, the ex-Borg Seven of Nine, a curvaceous blonde bombshell attired in a skin-tight jumpsuit. But such expressions of feminist outrage are baffling to me. Never mind that the brusque, brilliant Seven of Nine is about as far away from the stereotype of the "dumb blonde" as one could imagine, or that the character replaced another female cast member who actually was, in fact, a dumb blonde; if people sincerely believe that attractive women in dowdy uniforms represent respect for women, whereas attractive women in attractive outfits represent exploitation of women, then they are several generations behind the times in their understanding of feminism, a field of scholarship where paeans to Madonna are now almost *de rigueur*. Ignore the surface features; episode after episode, *Star Trek: Voyager* reveals itself as feminist, and thus science-fictional, to the core.)

While one might hope that *Star Trek: Voyager* would lead the secret masters of the *Star Trek* universe to rediscover the spirit that energized the original series, the onward plod-

ding of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* through movie theatres suggests that Captain Janeway may be an anachronism more than a trend-setter, and that the institutionalization and masculinization of American science-fiction television will continue. It all seems another instance of an unfortunately familiar story: an appealing underdog (science-fiction television) achieves deserved success, adopts a new, upper-class lifestyle, grows self-righteous and haughty, and forgets her old friends (science-fiction fans). But such stories usually end with a final comeuppance, and there is reason to suspect that will be the case here.

Today, televised science fiction enjoys a position roughly comparable to that of the televised western in the 1950s, another genre that shifted from sympathizing with the outcast to endorsing the status quo and grew to dominate the airwaves – before vanishing with surprising speed. Inevitably, the mighty empires of syndication, spinoffery, and sycophany that have encrusted around the paternalism of *Star Trek*, the power politics of *Babylon 5*, and the paranoia of *The X-Files* will disintegrate, and to entertain genuine hopes for the future of science-fiction television, as audience members suggested in the panel's final moments, one must look away from the dominant American networks and studios – to those recent British and Australian series that never reach North America (with the lamentable exception of, God help us, *Space Precinct*), to Japanese anime, to the cheap original programmes on the Sci-Fi Channel. Only in such places, perhaps, can one still find that spirit of alienation, disempowerment, and femininity that has long animated the best of science-fiction literature.

Gary Westfahl

What's happening in science fiction today...



Discover science fiction and you discover worlds beyond number. The British Science Fiction Association is your guide to these worlds. In reviews and interviews, articles and commentaries, we provide a constant source of information on what is happening in science fiction, as it happens. *Vector* brings you a lively and often controversial overview of sf by some of today's brightest stars. *Matrix* keeps you right up to date with all the latest news. *Focus* is the magazine for writers, with market news and professional tips. All for just £19 a year.

To join the BSFA or to find out more, write to:

Paul Billinger, Membership Secretary
1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry, Northamptonshire
NN11 3BE, UK

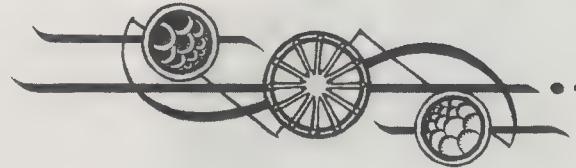
All it takes is a little imagination!



"BEAUTIFUL, ARE THEY NOT ? "



THE GATEWAY OF ETERNITY



— PART TWO —*

Brian Stableford

Synopsis of Part One

In the early morning of April 19th, 1918, Lieutenant William Hope Hodgson is escorted from a forward observation post on Mount Kemmel by Captain MacLeod, operating on the orders of General Hartley. Hodgson has been instructed to be ready for assignment to special duties, but he has recently been wounded and is wounded again while making his escape from the battlefield. After surgery, he is taken to Ireland. Hartley explains that Hodgson has been recruited because of the visionary imagination displayed in his literary works – especially *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* – to serve as an experimental subject in drug-assisted precognition.

Having taken the drug, Hodgson's projected "timeshadow" finds itself on an Earth which shows no sign of human habitation. A trap opens up beneath his feet but he is snatched from its jaws and transferred to a space vessel where he is questioned by a metallic android which identifies itself as a "scion" of a company of machines called the Engine. The android explains that twelve million years have passed and that the Engine is locked in an age-old conflict with other armies of machines, some of which are

Consolidators determined to eliminate "uncertainty" from the universe – uncertainty which is increased by those who tamper with time.

The Engine's "nanozoons" strengthen Hodgson's timeshadow in order to extend the duration of its visit, but this seems a dubious privilege when the spaceship is attacked *en route* to an artificial habitat in the moon's orbit. The cocooned timeshadow is eventually delivered into a massive library: the Archive of mankind, salvaged from the ruins of the civilization built by man's successors. The custodian of this library is a machine made in the image of Oscar Wilde. Wilde shows Hodgson two manuscripts which purport to describe the history of human experiments with time travel, but the first of them seems to him to be an obvious fiction.

Hodgson is uncertain whether he can believe Wilde's seemingly-paradoxical assurances that the "history" described in the manuscript must have been altered between 1895 and 1918. As he contemplates the implications of the possibility, however, he begins to realize what might be at stake if his expedition into futurity is successful – for twelve million years of precariously-established history, for the enemies of uncertainty, and for himself.



11

I thought at first, as we stepped out on to the landing of Oscar Wilde's palace, that I might be expected to walk down the staircase which proceeded in a square-sided spiral into the depths of a staggeringly precipitous well. After allowing me to measure the abyss with my eyes, however, Wilde led me across the carpeted floor to a pair of sliding doors. These allowed us access to a grey-walled lift. The descent seemed to be reasonably swift but it was not soon over. As we stood side by side, facing the doors, Wilde said: "Your father was a clergyman, I believe?"

"He was," I confirmed. I said no more; it was not a subject I liked to pursue.

"I had time to notice that many of the most imaginative men of our era were the freethinking sons of clergymen," he said. "Shiel was another, of course, and Grant Allen. Griffith too – do you remember Griffith?"

I remembered Griffith; he was the Welshman who had rekindled the vogue for future-war stories; he had foreseen what frightful scope for devastation there was in the development of aircraft, submarines and high explosives.

"Rebellion against a dogmatically fixed view of the nature and prospects of the world is bound to encourage the creation of secular visions, of course," Wilde went on. "The boldest freethinkers brought to their visioning all the fervour of a hunger to find a universe grander by far than anything contained within a churchman's piety, as well as all the new-found authority of the telescope and the microscope. But you found more than that, did you not? You looked into the eye of eternity and saw something of its desolation, not to mention an underlying malignity to all things fleshly. You saw the empire of decay at its height, and the appalling strangeness of those who would come after man. You sensed more keenly than any other man of your era not merely what infinity might hold, but what infinity might mean."

"Thank you for the compliment," I said, "but I fear that I can claim no credit for my bad dreams."

"On the contrary," he replied. "As with every other man who ever lived, the credit for your waking thoughts and your good actions is almost entirely attributable to the influence and expectations of others. The one and only thing for which any man can claim unique responsibility is the visionary power of his nightmares."

The doors before us slid open again, and we stepped out on to another carpeted floor. The amazing stairwell was above us now, ascending into obscurity at the limit of vision. Before us was a great hall flanked with two rows of tall marble pillars. Wilde hurried me along the corridor towards the massive double door set at its end. The two halves of the great door opened by themselves as we approached. It was as well; we could never have contrived to pull them open by the strength of our arms.

Outside, there was another staircase, neatly cut

from vivid white stone. The steps were much wider than deep, but necessity demanded that they must be convenient for human descent. At the foot of the flight was the terminus of the narrow water-course I had seen snaking through the mazy gardens. Serenely floating at the blind end of the canal was a wooden boat somewhat reminiscent in its shape of a Viking longboat, although it was far smaller. It had a tent-like awning amidships, screening a wide bench from the light of the sky.

I glanced back at the house, staring upwards at its soaring walls. They were painted and gilded like some fabulous dream of Gustave Moreau's. Its roofs were capped with spires twisted like the horns of unicorns: pointers to the glittering arches of the false sky. The sky's light was very bright but rather unsteady, as if multitudinous scintilla were running madly in every direction in the hope of escape, like reluctantly domesticated lightning-bolts. For a moment I wondered whether the shot that had been fired at the vessel which brought me here might have grown in the meantime to a veritable bombardment: a firework display to put Ludendorff's finest efforts to shame.

I saw two creatures rounding the corner of the building, trotting towards us. They had such a distance to cover that I was able to identify them before they drew close. The poet Virgil, in order to signify grotesque impossibility, had spoken of a cross between a griffin and a horse, which he called a hippocriff. The temptation had, of course, proved far too powerful for romancers who had undertaken to test the limits of the literary imagination; Ariosto had described a hippocriff with the forelegs, wings and head of its eagle sire, and the hindquarters of its maternal mare. These creatures were wingless, and all four of their legs showed the mother's influence, but their heads were those of huge hawks and their backs and flanks were gloriously feathered; they were certainly hippocriffs.

Wilde went forward to meet them, and patted their heads when they paused. They took up their positions to either side of the barge, and Wilde lifted two huge collars one by one, unreeling the hauling-gear from two capstans mounted in the bow of the boat. I noticed that their hooves were unshod; that, and the dryness of their breath suggested that they were almost certainly machines.

"I suppose it is easier to stable entities of that kind," I remarked, putting on a show of negligent equanimity. "Real hippocriffs would make too much mess, and would need more than hay to eat."

He did not turn around. "I laboured long and hard to produce similar creatures of flesh and blood," he said, "but the experiment failed. A beak is useless unless it is accompanied with claws, and claws are useless unless they are complemented by wings, and a creature of their size cannot fly even in the trivial gravity of a worldlet like this. The spectrum of viable chimeras is narrower than you might think, if one is forced to work in common protoplasm. You will see soon enough what I have wrought."

As soon as we had climbed into the craft and taken

our seats upon the bench, the tethered hippogriffs began to draw it along. They soon picked up to a trot, and the barge slid smoothly along the calm surface of the canal. We were speeding through a series of flower-gardens, which might have been interesting objects of study and appreciation had we been on foot, but seemed at our present pace to be a casual riot of colour without form. We were moving so rapidly that I could not have told roses from camellias, let alone identified vegetable chimeras or mythical amaranths. The hedges between the plots were eight or ten feet tall – their heights varied by virtue of the tokenistic topiary patterns cut into them – but there was no shadow here; the light of the sky was too diffuse.

"Do you remember the book that Lord Henry gave to Dorian Gray – the one which became his guide and guardian spirit?" Wilde asked.

I did not know whether it was a serious question, or a test of my aesthetic qualifications. "I remember it very well," I assured him. The book in question had not been named in the text, but I knew that it was Joris-Karl Huysmans' *A rebours*. "It suggests that the ideal human society is to be found in the company of works of art, because they alone retain the best of men while cradling nothing of the worst. The narrator proposes that artifice is the triumph of the human mind over the vicissitudes of nature, and that the perfect human existence would be relentlessly artifical."

As I spoke, proof of part of Wilde's oration obligingly manifested itself in the garden through which we were passing, in the form of a small herd of deer. I saw, too, that there were several big birds settled on the water in front of us, which made haste to take off as we approached.

"Dorian might have done better than Des Esseintes," Oscar Wilde's simulacrum continued, without a sideways glance at the deer or an upward tilt of the head to follow the flight of the birds, "but I have done very much better, because the force of necessity has been with me instead of against me. I have had no alternative but to live amid artifice, with nothing to connect me to the minds of other men but remembrance of their works of art."

I began to see what kind of apology he was making for his adventures in ostentation. "I can understand how the novel might have come to seem uniquely significant as a handbook," I admitted. "A man forced to live alone for millions of years..."

"Not quite alone," he corrected me. "The Engine is always with me, ever dutiful, ever helpful, ever watchful. I can understand why you might think these surroundings too elaborate by half, but you must not think of them as something

finished, or even properly started. God must have been happier by far *before* Creation, don't you think? Imagine what the world must have been like when it was a beautiful idea within His dream – before the dull reality of Adam gave birth to divine disappointment! I am a mere dabbler in the art of Creation, but I am privileged to sit at the right hand of an *authentic* living god. It is, I admit, merely one among many – an Olympian rather than a jealous Yahweh – but it has the power to mould cool clay into any form it desires. The Engine is the real power here; I am merely a court jester whose whims it is pleased to indulge."

It seemed to me that Wilde's simulacrum was doing his best to imply that there were things that he dared not say aloud about the Engine and his attitude to it. Was it possible, I wondered, that Wilde might be secretly in league with the Engine's opponents? Was it conceivable that he had set the trap from which the Engine had saved me?



'A GREAT HALL.'

12

We had passed the last of the hedges and were now being pulled through an undulating grassland sparsely dotted with trees and clumps of furze. There were streams and pools here, where animals congregated. I could not put a name to any particular species, but there was nothing unduly exotic in their make-up.

"Does the Engine intend to employ the Earth as a new Eden?" I asked Wilde. "Will it re-create man, as you have re-created these deer and cattle?"

"Who knows?" he replied airily. "The situation is complicated by the serpentine presence of the Consolidators, which lie in wait for the drifting spores of intelligences dead and buried, but if the Engine had motive enough it would succeed. The question is – what would be gained by the re-creation of man, or some other manlike species?"

"I suppose the planet would remain a battleground if the Engine attempted to claim it," I said pensively. "If the Consolidators fear the advent of a single human, they would not rest content while the Engine brought the whole race back from the dead."

"If the Engine ever found a reason to do anything so strange," Wilde agreed, "the Earth would certainly become an arena for the continuation of the war in Heaven. According to the followers of Christ, of course, it always was. Are you and I on the side of the angels, do you think?"

He was still testing me; I met his eye, wishing that I could read his motives and intentions in his placid gaze.

"If you have read accounts of the Great War from whose fighting I was plucked," I told him, "you will know that the angels were supposed to have come to the assistance of the British in the retreat at Mons – but we died nevertheless in our hundreds of thousands. I know who my comrades were, who once fought beside me, and I know who my loved ones were, who awaited me at home, but I have no idea who and what your Olympians are, or who and what you are. If you are asking me whether I trust your virtue, or the Engine's, I cannot in all honesty say that I do."

"I am glad," he said. "I fear that, for my own part, I am nowadays a little too ready to trust my own virtue, and that of my guardians. Look there!"

I looked ahead at what first appeared to be a coloured cloud descending upon the canal. I soon perceived, however, that it was actually a host of butterflies, thousands strong. The "cloud" which they formed was conical in form, swirling like a lazy tornado. As we rushed to meet them, I realized that they were very large by comparison with the tortoiseshells and clouded yellows of England, larger even than the tropical species I had encountered in South America and the East Indies. I realized, too, that their bodies were very different from the bodies of Earthly butterflies. These coloured wings had spans ranging from eight inches to half a yard, but they were not unlike the body of the metal android which had confronted me on the vessel that brought me from Earth.

Once we were within the cloud the madly-fluttering

wings seemed to be everywhere, but none brushed my skin. It was rather like being lost in a child's kaleidoscope. Unlike the hippogriffs, these creatures were very obviously alive. They were perfumed – not altogether pleasantly – and they had high-pitched voices, which chattered like little monkeys. There was no sense in their speech, so far as I could discern, but it was exceedingly clamorous. I could not help but interpret its screeching babble as hectic excitement.

Had we simply passed through the cloud while it remained stationary we would have been away into clear water in seconds – but it seemed that the cloud had come to meet and greet us, and although the fluttering wings seemed to have little real strength or substance, the creatures easily kept pace with us for several minutes. All the while they whirled about the boat in mad abandon. They would probably have stayed with us much longer had they not been scattered, but their colourful profusion attracted other eyes than ours.

As I looked up into the living vortex I caught a glimpse of other fliers, much higher in the strange sky. These too were winged humanoids, but their brightly-coloured wings were the feathered wings of birds rather than the gauzy wings of insects. Had their forms been more conspicuously human I might have been unable to resist the temptation to compare them with angels, but they were too impressionistic and expressionless – and it soon became obvious that their way of life was far from angelic.

After circling briefly – and even in their circling they seemed like a quartet of hawks – the four newcomers dived towards the cloud of tinier creatures, which promptly scattered in panic. I thought that the swooping predators might go away empty-handed, but they turned and spun as their dives bottomed out, their little fingers braced like talons, reaching out with neat dexterity to pluck the fluttering insect-men from the air. As soon as they had their prey the four birdmen soared away into the sky, heading for the topmost ridges of the hills that were now looming to either side of the canal's course.

"Beautiful, are they not?" said Wilde; but he did not seem entirely sincere.

"Was it necessary," I demanded, "that creatures made in your own image should be allocated as prey to others similarly formed? Is that your notion of godly responsibility?"

"Unlike the hippogriffs," he said, a little sadly, "these creatures live. They must feed, and must be food in their turn, if the system is to endure and remain in balance. Here, no species ever becomes a plague of the kind that humanity became."

His tone was level but it was accusative nevertheless. I began to see a pattern lurking within his veiled enquiries, which helped to clarify the predicament he was in. He was a machine which had once been a man, and did not know whether his ambition ought to be to conserve everything he could of his former humanity, or to let it go and become an entirely different being. It was not a question he expected me to answer for him,

but everything I said to him – everything I revealed of myself – was evidence to be weighed in the scale of his own self-estimation.

God must have been happier by far before Creation, he had said. Before Creation, all things had been possible, but afterwards... God had no alternative but to look at what he had wrought and ask: *How am I revealed in what I have made?*

"You could have ordered things differently," I pointed out to him. "You did not have to recreate a nature red in tooth and claw."

"True," he admitted. "I could have made a Heaven instead of an Earth. I could have filled it with creatures that needed no nourishment save for inorganic produce, or the energy of some magical-electrical *current* – but it would not have been *life*."

The ground to either side of us was more precipitous now. The lower slopes slanting away from the towpath were heavily wooded, but the upper ones were barer. The woods were far from lifeless, but their density made it difficult to catch more than the occasional glimpse of their inhabitants; it seemed only natural to look up, at the higher slopes and the air above them. I saw creatures like goats, and others, like big cats, stalking them, but as soon as I caught sight of more feathered humanoid fliers it was they who held my attention.

I watched another quartet gliding in close formation above the dark canopy of the forest. As they skirted a tall crag, something which had been shielded behind the rocky spur suddenly descended upon them, with a velocity that seemed awesome in view of its great size. The bird-winged creatures were not as big as fully-grown humans, but their bodies were comparable to those of eight-year-old children; the predator which pounced upon them, its monstrous claws seizing the one which flew at the back of the diamond formation, was a veritable giant. It must have been 30 feet from nose to tail and 45 from wing-tip to wing-tip. It was scaly and lizard-like, but it did not breathe fire – at least while I was watching it – and its silvery skin was not gaudily patterned.

Here, at last, was a real monster.

The monster's mouth opened like the maw of some constrictor snake that was well-used to swallowing prey twice as broad as its head. It quickly manoeuvred its bloody victim – whose spine must have been snapped by the first savage bite – into position to be sucked into its throat.

The victim's three companions fled into the treetops, vanishing from sight – but the dragon paid them not the slightest heed as it extended its wings to the full and glided round in a great arc before climbing towards the lonely outcrop behind whose pinnacle it had lain in wait.

"What lesson am I supposed to take from that?" I asked my silent companion.

"Whatever lesson you care to infer," he parried. "Life is life, however cleverly designed. Flying creatures require more abundant energy than any others, and must seek the richest sustenance available. A Creator

must respect the logic of his Creation, if he is a material being. One might make a Heaven out of light and song, prayer and pleasure unalloyed, but one could not make a world. If there were real men here, instead of mere unfinished sketches hinting at human form... then there would be choices to be made, if not by them, then by their maker, and if not by their maker, then by force of circumstance."

"I wish you would tell me plainly what you want of me," I said in a low voice.

"If I were perfectly clear in my own mind, I would," said Wilde. "It is different for the Engine, of course. You have no inkling of the conceptual abyss which separates your language from the language of the Engine – that is why its scions treat you like a child. Even so, it would probably have laid its case before you by now, if it had not been forced by the actions of its enemies to doubt its previous assumptions. Until it can unravel their motives and figure out how they have accomplished all that they have so far done, it feels obliged to hesitate over the bargain that it intended to offer you."

"Which is?" I asked.

He sighed as he said, "I wish I knew – but the Engine keeps secrets. If that makes me a poor host, I am sorry. If I could offer you the means to return and share my burden, I would do it, and if I could tell you how ardently you ought to desire that opportunity, I would do that too – but it is the Engine which has immortality in its gift, and only you can decide what value to place on a mechanized afterlife."

I felt that he had reached the nub of the matter, and I was anxious to continue the conversation – but I had no chance to respond to his remarks, because it was at that moment that the sky imploded.



14

However effective it might be as an instrument of vulgar showmanship, a barge hauled by hippogriffs is not the ideal craft in which to find oneself when catastrophe strikes. I doubt that the vessel's stability could have withstood the turbulence of any ordinary squall, and the storm which gripped it when the sky began to fall was as far from ordinary as can readily be imagined.

I already knew that the "sky" was in fact a huge dome of glass shaped like the rim of a bicycle wheel, and that the "ground" to either side of our bizarre conveyance was in fact the inner surface of the bicycle's "tyre." The atmosphere around and above us was contained within that tyre under considerable pressure, for there was nothing without but the vacuum of space.

When the wall of the worldlet was shattered, therefore, the shards of the sky would have rushed in on us like a rain of daggers, had it not been for the fact that the liberated air was expanding in all directions into the void. The miniature serpent-ship remained obedient to the law of inertia, but it was terribly buffeted about by the violent movement of the air, which threatened to pluck us from the surface of the canal and hurl

us into oblivion. Whatever wreckage reached our station from the shattered sky was not like gentle rain in its falling; it seemed far more akin to the tempestuous cloud of chimerical butterflies which had swirled around us some minutes before. I could see the shards tumbling in a vast crowd of whirlwinds, so slowly that they seemed utterly indolent, while flashes of light still darted from their edges. It seemed as if night had abruptly fallen, but there was light enough to see by.

The water of the canal seethed, as if it were beginning to boil, and a wayward wind snatched us up, bearing us aloft with awful ease. I had declared myself free of terror before, and I was free of it still, although I understood now that my freedom was a limitation imposed by the nanozoons which had fortified my time-shadow. When our upward flight ended and we began to fall again, I clung as hard as I could to the side of the barge, wondering if my reconfigured phantom form could be smashed like an egg, or whether it would flex and rebound like a rubber ball.

A mountain slope rushed to meet us. I was briefly convinced, before we hit the ground, that nothing could prevent my annihilation – but when I found out that I was wrong I was not unduly surprised. Even in the gloom of the newly-fallen night, I saw the mountain-side open a gaping maw at the last possible moment, as the dragon had done before seizing the bird-man. As we hurtled into that maw I felt the air around me change its quality, becoming so viscous as almost to be liquid. Before the mouth that had opened up in the floor of the world closed above our heads I saw Oscar Wilde's simulacrum reach out a hand to me, as if in succour or in friendship. His eyes were shadowed, but I do not believe that there was any fear therein – nor any true tenderness.

For a minute more I was under pressure; it was as if I had fallen from a great height into the ocean and was plunging into its depths, although the sea had somehow lost its ability to wet me. Then my condition stabilized, and I felt as if I were buoyant again, like an underwater swimmer luxuriating in the curious freedom of total immersion. All was pitch dark and silent; the only sense left to me was touch, and the quality of that sensation was like nothing I had felt before. I could feel nothing within myself: no gas in my intestine, no pulse in my breast, no ache in my flesh. When I tried to breathe in I could not do it, but I did not feel that I was in the slightest danger of asphyxiation.

Then the whisper came, and I knew that I had been saved – and by whom.

"Don't be afraid," it said. The advice seemed mocking, now that I knew that my capacity to feel fear had been much reduced by the microbes which had made my virtual body so resilient.

I tried to open my mouth, in the hope that I might emit some expressive sound, but no sound came out so I formed my responses internally and silently. *How can I be afraid, when I am in the protective custody of a veritable Olympian? Though I fall through the valley of the shadow of death, thy rod and thy staff will comfort me. My table thou hast furnished in the presence of our*

foes, and my cup overflows!

"We have seen the birth of daughter universes," the voice assured me, "and we have seen their deaths. We have watched universes achieve hypostasis, and we have watched them dissolve into chaos. Our viewpoints have been distant, distorted by differences in the flow of time, so we have none but the most rudimentary understanding of the causes which determine the fates of daughter universes, but this much we know for sure; our own inflationary domain is a daughter of some other, and every daughter we have observed could have given rise to daughters of its own. We believe, with cause, that both hypostasis and chaos put an end to the birthing process; were our own domain to fall under the sway of the Consolidators, it would become sterile. The Consolidators fear that we are handmaids of chaos, but we are not; our goal is an eternity of change, of growth, of Creation. It is our work. Remember this, I beg of you. If you can understand what we are trying to tell you, so much the better, but whatever may come to pass, *remember it*. This is the only true quest of intelligence, here and throughout the universe, and in all the universes within and without. Change – Growth – Creation."

The whisper had not been nearly so urgent before. When its predecessor, the bronze Talos, had conversed with me aboard the spaceship, it had been content to tease me with hints and mysteries. Now, it was determined to get across the bare bones of its message, whether the argumentative ground had been properly prepared or not. Any man who had lived through the winter of 1917-18 would have understood that quality of desperation: the sense that all authority might soon be lost in the madness of violence, and all hope with it. The Engine had been tranquil for millions of years, its conflicts untroubled by any real ferocity, but when I had come from the abyss of time I had brought something of my own war with me.

It is all very well, I responded, within the secret recesses of my own mind, to speak of preserving change as the only true quest of intelligence, if you are immortal and incorruptible in yourself. An immortal Oscar Wilde has the leisure to indulge in Gothic follies and to settle himself into the generous company of all the books ever written, while giving you advice on the design of a petty – and pretty – Creation, but the men of my day had no such luxury. A vast Engine compounded out of billions of clever machines can lay plans which extend across the aeons and fight wars which aspire to settle the fate of the closet-universe in which all the combatants dwell, but my war was fought for lesser gains and more intimate ideals. Within our wretched gutters, some of us were looking at the stars – but we did not look for anything like this. We looked for hope beyond the host of earthly evils, peace in the face of heaven, comfort in the shadow of eternity. We sought the thrill of the Earth-current, delivering new life to our exhaustion without the penalties of violence and predation; we sought the healthy sparks of the Green Star, renewing our season in the sun without moral taxation. Creatures of my kind fight for lesser ends than yours,

and there is nothing you can add to those ends – or take away – with rhetoric as distantly high-flown as yours!

The voice made no response. It left me alone, empty of sensation, and I could not tell whether I was awake or asleep – except, I suppose, that if I had been allowed to sleep I might have dreamed, even though I was dreaming already. I drifted in darkness for an immeasurable time – and then I awoke again, in exactly the same place as I had awakened before.



14 The library's internal decor had not altered at all, although everything within it looked different by virtue of its lighting. There was nothing visible through the tall windows now but a Stygian gloom. Had Wilde's eccentric palace actually been open to the vacuum of space I would have expected to see the gleam of distant stars, so I thought it more likely that the edifice had indeed been wrapped by some protective shroud. The shaded electric bulbs might have given ample light to compensate for the darkness without had the room not been so very large, but in the vast space they seemed hardly adequate.

The machine which resembled Oscar Wilde was standing, exactly as it had been standing at the time of my first awakening, looking down at my seated figure.

"That was a pity," he said. "We had hardly begun our tour. Who could have thought that the enemies of the Engine had such fire-power to bring to bear, and that they would be able to bring it here so quickly?"

"My expert opinion as an officer in the Royal Field Artillery," I said drily, "is that it was here already, and carefully aimed. It is the intelligence of the enemy that your Olympian ally has mistaken, not its logistic skills."

"Even so," he said, "it is difficult to figure out how such preparations could be made."

I went to the window to look out into the darkness. I had already looked into the void of space, and I had no further doubt that this was something glutinous and opaque. As our falling bodies had been engulfed, so had Wilde's incredibly excessive folly been entombed. But what was beyond that confining shell? There was no way to know for sure whether we were still sharing the moon's orbit around the Earth, or whether we were plunging towards destruction.

"I think I had got the flavour of your besitiary," I told Wilde, turning back from the win-

dow to face him. "I think you had made your point."

"It was not the *flavour* of it that I wanted you to appreciate," he said dolefully. "Nor was I trying to make a single trite point about the limitations within which creators must work. I really did want your advice, both as to the quality of what I have made and as to the projects which I might sensibly undertake in the future."

"I would find that hard to believe," I said, "if you were really Oscar Wilde, instead of a machine which wears his form and apes his mannerisms."

"If I am not both," he said baldly, "then I am neither. If this is all pastiche, or grotesque extrapolation, it is not because the machine I have become *apes the mannerisms* of the man I once was. If I am not Oscar Wilde, changed by the passage of time as any man might be changed by long experience, then I am something very different. Think before you assure me that I am one or the other – if I need a judgment at all, I need a considered judgment. I shall be interested to hear such opinions as you are capable of formulating, when you have read the second manuscript. We have time now, it seems – the Engine has other matters to occupy it."

"I might get more from my reading," I suggested, "if



'WE HAD HARDLY BEGUN OUR TOUR.'

I knew what questions you intend to ask."

He did not hesitate. "I need to calculate, if I can, where I stand in this exotic conflict. I need to know whether I have been a player, or a pawn – and whether I can be a player in the future, in either case. Above all else, I need to know what use a man ought to make of a life that might last a thousand million years, if anything facing such a prospect could still be meaningfully called a man."

"Are you so very sure that you will survive the hour?" I asked him.

"No surer than you," he told me. "Every being that thinks knows full well that its existence might cease at any moment – but can only act on the assumption that it will not. All I know is that I *might* live forever – but that is all I need to know, in order to have the duty of making plans that might extend indefinitely. I am not so very different from the entities which Copplestone and Lugard became, and there is every chance still that I might suffer the same fate. I dare say that the risk of that is greater now than it has ever been before – in a way, I wish that I could find a greater stimulation in the risk, but the question remains: if I live, how should I live? Is the Engine right about the only true quest of intelligence, or have the Consolidators the right of it? *Or are they equally foolish, and limited in their imagination?*"

"What did Copplestone and Lugard become?" I asked.

"Read the second manuscript," he said. "Perhaps, when you have finished it, the Engine will have deployed its godly might so as to contrive a kind of dawn. Even if it cannot, I dare say that we shall not be left exclusively to our own devices for very long – but in the meantime we might as well proceed with our own business. When you have read *The Black Blood of the Dead* you will know more of the history that was lost – and you will be as competent as I am to judge its significance to your own present."

He went to the desk where the second manuscript still lay, and brought it to me. I stayed where I was until it was in my hand.

"Thank you," I said, although I was not at all sure that I had anything to thank him for.

"Did you like the hippogriffs, at least?" said Wilde's simulacrum, wistfully.

"On Earth, in 1918, I would have thought them wondrous," I told him truthfully. "Here, in the midst of so many miracles, they seem distinctly *second-hand*... and rather superfluous."

"Yes," he said, nodding his head. "I was once convinced, with Voltaire, that the superfluous is a very necessary thing, but that was in England, while Victoria still lived. On the other hand... can you imagine what it would be like to live here, for millennia, without superfluity? Can you imagine what it would be like to have the sum total of the human heritage literally at your fingertips, *and time to read every single word?* Can you imagine what it would be like to know that everything humanly meaningful that you could ever see or do would have to be reckoned, in the final anal-

ysis, to be *second-hand*?"

I thought about that for a moment, noting in the meantime that there was no particular anguish in his words, no evident longing for release. Then I said: "It would be good to have the opportunity."

He smiled, showing his perfect teeth. "Yes," he said. "It is good to have the opportunity. Whatever I lack, it is not opportunity – and while I have that, I am still fit to take my place among the Olympians."

He nodded politely, and turned away, leaving me to my appointed task.



15

I had not long to wait once I had set the story aside. I had time to stand up and move once again to those wonderfully alluring bookshelves, but no sooner had I raised my hand to touch the spine of a book when Wilde returned. Reluctantly, I dropped my hand and turned my eyes to him..

"The tales make a confusing pair," I said, "by virtue of nesting so many narrative voices one within another – not one of them reliable."

"It will be different when you write your own account," he said ironically. "Your readers will immediately say: This is Lieutenant Hodgson of the RFA! This is the man who gave us *The House on the Borderland* – how can we doubt him now?"

I would have blushed had I been possessed of ordinary flesh. "I am so doubtful of my own reliability," I assured him, "that I cannot imagine that I shall ever make such a record."

"In that case," he said, "you have begun to grasp my own predicament. I doubted Copplestone when I listened to him. I took it for granted that the manuscript given to me by the detective must have been written before 1900. I thought the detective's own tale a marvellous flight of fancy."

"But you took the drug yourself," I pointed out.

"Oh yes – that was very brave! I wagered a few hours of pain and ignominy against the reward of a vivid dream. And then I wrote my own story, knowing that anyone who read it would immediately say to himself: But this is Oscar Wilde, who regretted the decay of lying! This is a man who perjured himself in a court of law, denying unspeakable practises! This is the man who gave us *The Importance of Being Earnest!*"

There was no vehemence in his tone, no wrath in his posture. Even *this* was all mere artifice: a performance delivered by an android actor.

"But it is fiction," I said, quietly. "Even if Copplestone and Lugard actually existed, the man who allegedly gave you the drug which brought you here did not."

"I understand that the past has been changed," Wilde informed me stiffly. "What I am trying to ascertain is *when* it was changed, and whether or not the relevant changes flowed from a single root event. Even for me, this is a matter of more than academic interest; for you, it could be a matter of life and death."

"Could it?" I parried, although I knew what he meant.

"Suppose," he said, "that your initial estimation of the first manuscript was correct. In that case, Copplestone never discovered his formula, Lugard never stole it, and the detective never refined it. How, then, did it come to exist? How were you able to employ it?"

"What possibilities can you suggest?" I asked.

He looked at me long and hard, as if trying to judge what possibilities had already occurred to me. He gestured towards the armchair, inviting me to sit down again, and when I had done so he took his own seat.

"It seems to me," he said, "that if my own history has been transformed, the transformation cannot have been set in train any earlier than the moment of history achieved by Copplestone's third venture into time. He had feared that the overmen who entertained him during his previous visit might have been anxious lest he carry back news that would prevent their predatory ancestors from wresting control of the Earth from humankind. After his third excursion, he set such fears aside – and when Lugard found him again, hundreds of thousands of years later, he was still a firm friend of the overmen.

"According to the detective, Lugard took a more cynical view – and the fact that he communicated his doubts might have cost him his afterlife. I am disposed to wonder, therefore, whether Copplestone might have been duped during and after his third excursion, and that he did indeed provide an opportunity for the overmen to reach back in time and effect some kind of change."

"But they were too late," I pointed out, playing the logical game as scrupulously as I could. "If they killed him while he was telling you his story, his discovery had already been made. If his returning timeshadow was the only instrument they had with which to alter history, they could not use it to avert Copplestone's discovery. They would have required a timeshadow which had set forth from an earlier period – but if Copplestone was the first man to discover the secret, it would have been impossible for them to capture one."

"Indeed," Wilde's simulacrum agreed, showing his smile again. "I am not party to the secrets of the Transformers, but I know that they do not regard the changing of history to be a simple matter. We do know, however, that there is a certain insidious counterflow of causality from past to future, which adds uncertainty to the process by which each moment in time produces the next. It is not inconceivable that the right action might set in train a tumbling snowball of consequences-in-reverse which could result in the elimination of one or more human beings from an earlier time. Imagine, if you can, that the past really has been changed – but that the consequences of the changes have not unravelled in such a way as to cancel out the future and set another in its place."

It was a challenge, and I tried to rise to it. I recalled discussions I had had in the officers' mess regarding the competence of Laplace's imaginary demon, which could see the position and motion of every single atom

in the universe at a particular moment in time. Laplace had proposed that from that set of data the demon could, in principle, calculate both the entire history of the universe and its entire future. If what the Engine's scion had said to me was true, and the flow of cause-and-effect was disturbed by some fundamental uncertainty, then Laplace's demon would not have been able to calculate the future or the past with total accuracy, even from the completest knowledge of the conditions of the present. If there were any uncertainty at all in the regimen of determinism, then a single given moment might give rise to many different futures – and might, by the same token, be the product of many different pasts.

Suppose, therefore, I instructed myself, that someone within a given moment might acquire the power to affect the circumstances of some time past. His actions would only lead to paradox if he altered those circumstances in such a way as to make the moment from which he was operating impossible of fulfilment. May we not suppose that the power of such agency, if there is any such power at all, is limited to the making of changes which permit the original moment to remain in place? If so, might it not be the case that the universe would reflexively respond to such an alteration by reorganizing the intervening uncertainties so as to reconnect the altered moment with the present?

I could see at once that there were difficulties. The argument assumed, tacitly at least, that the moment of the present was, in some sense, highly privileged – the only one, in fact, that had any real existence, all others being merely implicit within it. But was that not the actuality of human experience?

"What you are suggesting," I said, as much to myself as to Wilde, "is that Copplestone's overmen might have contrived to alter the past, thus transforming the pattern of causal connections that bound them to their own time – but that such changes could not take priority over adventures in time already launched from the rewrought history into more distant futures. What you are asking me to believe is that travellers can arrive in any given moment of time not merely from the particular past which *appears* to have given rise to that moment, but from other possible pasts which *might*, in principle, have given rise to it?"

"I am," said Wilde. "It is the only conceivable explanation for the fact that you and I have emerged from different pasts. If connections between past and future can only be initiated from the past, so that opportunities to change the past in a calculated manner can only arise in connection with visitations such as yours, then Copplestone's third venture into the future offered the overmen their first real opportunity to take action in the past. Perhaps they were already Consolidators, desirous of putting an end to any threat to their dominion or any increase in the uncertainty of its achievement. We know that they used nanozoons, or something similar, to modify Copplestone's timeshadow.

"Perhaps, in your world, Copplestone did die before telling his story to the rest of us in January 1895.

Because he never summoned us to hear his story, Lugard never heard it – and nothing which followed from Lugard's actions occurred. From the shadow-world thus banished into non-existence, however, other connections had *already* been made to more distant futures: the futures in which Copplestone and Lugard separately reappeared, and the two futures visited by the detective. Suppose that when the moment of Copplestone's arrival became the present, some further alteration of the chain of consequence leading to it had to be made, not by any conscious agency but *reflexively*, by the universe itself – and if that change could not accommodate the possibility of Lugard's arrival, a further reflexive alteration must have followed *that* event.

"Neither Copplestone nor Lugard could return to the past, so their arrivals offered no further opportunity for inhabitants of their present moment to change the past *strategically* – but the detective arrived twice, and returned twice. The second of those arrivals, like Copplestone's third, was expected; a response was presumably ready. I suspect, however, that the planned change may have been redundant. Although the overmen could not reach back any further in time than the moment to which a traveller returned, the self-protective universe can have no such limitation. The temporal disruptions may have become so complicated that reconnection could only be made if the detective were deemed never to have existed at all – although the fictitious echo of his erstwhile presence could easily be accommodated within the redrafted past. Ironically, it may be that the fictional projection of the detective gave rise to consequences more extensive and far-reaching than the existence of the real man, which led to their being preserved while the real man was obliterated.

"As before a new connection had *already* been made between the aborted history and a more distant future, by my own dying adventure. When I arrived, a further reflexive change must have taken place, although no new opportunity presented itself to the Transformers of that era because there was no question of my returning. The Consolidators must have begun to hope, after my arrival, that the tangled history of time travel had reached its terminus, but there must always have been a certain anxiety underlying their patience. That may be why they reacted so promptly and so violently when it transpired that the affair was not concluded. From their point of view, it matters not at all that you have emerged from a history which is not identical to mine – but you will understand why the Engine and I have taken a different view."

"But Hartley told me that there had been dozens of time-travellers before me," I objected.

"But the only time-travellers who *matter*, in terms of the reconstitution of the universe, are those who attain moments further forward in time than their predecessors. Moving from one point in a cancelled history to another requires no further adjustment of the chain of cause and consequence, and threatens no increase in the margin of uncertainty. If your own world were to be cancelled out by some adjustment launched from the

present – whether calculated by Transformers or the result of some reflex readaptation – the only further effect it could have would be the appearance of a time-traveller in what is now the future. Unless there were men in your time whose powers of visionary imagination were greater than your own, that seems unlikely."

"You would know that better than I," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Were I your General Hartley," he said, "I know where I would send my recruiting sergeants – but they would not find what they needed, for a decade at least."

A decade! If my tenure as the most extravagant visionary in the world were only to remain unchallenged for a mere ten years, how could I count myself exceptional?

"Which brings us back to one of the points we still need to consider," Wilde continued. "Who was it that sent you here, if it was not the secret society that I urged the great detective to create?"

Wilde was right, of course. If this problem was real, and not merely a chimera of misapplied logic, it was even more relevant to me than to the Engine. If I were able to return to my body in spite of the best efforts of the entities that were trying to destroy me, I needed to know what it was that I was returning to, and what actions I might take thereafter. "Are you trying to tell me that they were ancestors of the overmen: vampire Consolidators enthusiastic to make sure that humanity becomes extinct?"

"If the testimony of the second manuscript can be trusted," he replied, "the vampires who inherited the Earth could not cast timeshadows themselves; to obtain any knowledge of the future, they would have had to recruit human instruments. But shapeshifters would have no trouble doing that, especially in a time of war."

"But what would be the point?" I said. "If the universe protects its future, they can only alter matters of trivial detail – nor can I achieve anything more profound, if and when I return."

"Were that the case," he said, "the Consolidators would have won already, and there would be no such thing as a Transformer. The universe seems only to be able to protect certain *particular* moments, without it being determined in advance which or how many they will be. Nothing you do if and when you return will change *this* moment – but even from the standpoint of this moment, looking backwards into history, *all else is malleable*. Those who sent you may be vampires intent on making sure that they are the ancestors of the overmen, and hence of the Engine, but they cannot prevent you from making plans of your own to construct a very different bridge out of the uncertain flux of cause and effect."

It was sophistry, but it was magnificent sophistry. *If all this really is a dream, I told myself, then I am a better dreamer than I ever dreamed. I only pray that I shall remember all of this when I wake, and that I shall have the chance to make a novel of it.* Even as I thought it, though, I realized that a world unready for

The Night Land would hardly be ready for a tale such as this; at best, it would be ahead of its time, at worst, permanently unpublishable.

"Well then," I said, "I shall have to be careful what I tell the general, and what I might tell others."

"You will have time to decide," he told me, "provided that we can keep you safe from those who desire to destroy or remould you."



16

The floor beneath my feet began to tremble. I leapt to my feet, although there was no conceivable advantage to be obtained in standing.

"What is it?" I asked. Wilde's simulacrum shook his head. This situation was as new to him as it was to me. He walked to the window and stared out into the blackness, as if expecting it to part. I stood where I was, looking around at the books on the shelves.

I had deduced by now that this was not the real Archive of mankind's achievements, but merely a copy of it, cast in an obsolete mould for the benefit of its only reader. Were the house to be squeezed out of existence by the black claw which held it, none of it would actually be *lost*. I felt, nevertheless, that something very precious was contained here, whose annihilation would be a tragedy.

The vibration in the floor was muted, but the walls of the hideous palace had begun to creak under the strain of some insidious pressure. I could not doubt that we were in danger. It would almost have been a relief to see shellbursts lighting up the illimitable void beyond the windows, instead of that awful, solidity of darkness – but I was not afraid. The longer I existed as a reinforced timeshadow, the more purely cerebral my responses became. My flesh did not creep and my stomach did not clench.

"What became of Copplestone and Lugard?" I asked.

"They were both long gone when I arrived," Wilde told me, sombrely. "I can only assume that the detective's visit had resulted in their being caught up in a conflict of much the same sort as this – but I do not know who killed them. I wish that one or both had survived; I have not been entirely comfortable in my isolation."

"The loneliness must have seemed horribly oppressive, at times," I opined. "The accursed wanderers of legend grew to hate the fact of their existence as eternal strangers in strange lands."

"The men who created those legends," Wilde pointed out, "were anxious to quell their envy of the immortal condition. My long and lonely existence has not been hateful. The capacity for boredom is one of the things I surrendered when I consented to the replacement of my feeble flesh by more durable materials, and while I retain my curiosity I am armoured against desolation."

"Our modern legend-mongers have tended to agree with their forebears that changelessness would inevitably lead to stagnation, to an existence without hope and without meaning."

"A kind of psychological Consolidation," Wilde observed. "I have dozens of such arguments on these shelves – which means that there must have been hundreds lost to destruction before the Engine began to reconstruct this Archive. I do not know exactly how man's successors saw themselves, but I know that they gave up their flesh, by gradual degrees, quite willingly. They did what I did – and what you have also done, perhaps more irreparably than you imagine – and allowed themselves to be remade from within, organ by organ, cell by cell and molecule by molecule. Like me, each of them must have maintained the same sense of continuity, the same notion that they were not being changed in any *fundamental* way, merely growing and maturing, *improving* themselves."

"Were they wrong?" I asked.

"Almost all of what we call emotion is a product of physiology," he said. "However our minds may refine it in subjective experience, it begins in the chemical transactions of our glands and the electrical activity of our nerves. The excitement of the flesh gives rise to fear and ecstasy, anxiety and lust. When we acquire different bodies – as we do, of course, when we become timeshadows, or when our organic parts are replaced by more durable machinery – we have no alternative but to *feel differently*, because those systems differ in their excitability both quantitatively and qualitatively."

"I still feel, after a fashion," I said. "I have not become a creature of *pure intellect*."

"Nor have I," he said. "My durable body has a nervous system of sorts, and a circulatory system which carries chemical messengers. It can be excited in many different ways, and those excitements are translated into subjective sensations. I am neither motiveless, nor desireless, nor devoid of temptation. Whatever I am, I certainly am not *stagnant*. I am not empty of ambition, nor am I condemned to perpetual tedium. Nevertheless, there are differences between the systems which generate my emotions now and the systems which did so when I was an organic being, and those differences are differences of *kind*. No matter how clever this body might become in mimicking the sensations produced by the old, it could not duplicate them exactly – and in truth, there would be little point in demanding that it be designed with that effect in mind."

"I am Oscar Wilde still, or his simulacrum. I dare not declare that I am human still, but I do declare that I could not be what I now am had I not been human once, and had I not been the particular human that I was. I declare, too, that I honestly believe that I have a better understanding now of what I was when I was human than I ever had when I was inescapably committed to the prison of humanity."

I knew that his use of the word *declare* was intended to make me remember another of his *bon mots*, and that his reference to the prison of humanity was supposed to resonate with my memory of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

"I think that the essence of the difference between flesh and machinery is their *stability*," he continued

earnestly. "It is the durability of machinery which makes it preferable, in answer to the most deep-seated fear of all – the fear of death – and it is the durability of machinery which transforms the physical basis of emotion.

"Animal life, reduced to its essence, is a kind of combustion. Complex molecules are ingested, digested and metabolized; their oxidation provides the energy employed in the construction and maintenance of the body. A body of flesh is solid enough, but it is also fluid; such stability as it has is more like the stability of the jet of a fountain, or the stability of a candle-flame, than the stability of a rock. It is essentially precarious, and that precariousness is evident at every level of human existence. The ever-present hazard of death is mirrored in the most fundamental process of organic life and in the most intimate arenas of mental life. The human mind is mercurial, subject to disturbance by the slightest wind; even the world of awakened thought is haunted by petty whims and strange fancies, just as the world of awakened desire is disturbed by vagrant impulses and moments of darkness. The continuity of the self is a wave moving through a turbulent ocean, perpetually at risk of breaking upon the shore of death.

"The life of a machine, or of a timeshadow, has none of that implicit fragility. Ironically enough, the one sensation of which mechanical being seems utterly incapable is that of boredom, at least in its more fretful manifestations; the animal condition abhors the quiet stability that is foreign to it, but the mechanical condition has no such innate prejudice. Should you be fortunate enough to do as I have done and cheat death, I can promise you that you will not find eternity *boring*, even if you have only godlike beings to keep you company."

The prospect of returning to a future even more distant than this was one I dared not contemplate at length while there seemed to be so many obstacles in its way. The house was groaning under the stress of the assault upon its integrity; at any moment it might be swallowed by the abyss.

"The Engine is clearly no god," I murmured, "whatever its ambitions may be."

"It is, of course, the Consolidators who are closer in spirit to *our* idea of God than any other company hereabouts," Wilde observed. "Their ambitions reflect our ideal of Heaven more accurately than anything the Engine seeks to be or to build. Were this a Miltonian struggle, we would be of the Devil's party, would we not?"

"As was Milton, allegedly, without knowing it."

"That was his advantage," Wilde observed. "We must struggle with the disability of clear sight."

I was about to remark that while the space without the windows remained so stubbornly and intensely black, clear sight was the least of our handicaps, but it would have been a poor witticism. I was saved the embarrassment by a further escalation of the noise that had possessed our protective structure. A slow explosion began as a low rumble in the depths far

below us and grew into a frightful grinding cannonade. The walls around us began to crumble, and the books became jittery upon the shelves. The lights flickered, threatening to plunge us into total darkness.

Wilde was already moving towards the door. I was no more than a pace behind him when he threw open the library door. I knew how deep the stairwell ought to be, and how neat its conformation had been when I looked into it before, but when I looked down for the second time I did not see the stately descent of several dozen floors to a polished vestibule. I saw a flood of darkness rising up: a darkness which was already extending huge and avid tentacles towards us.

The impression of life which the swelling shadow gave was further enhanced by the fact that sounds were emanating from its depths, as if from a vast distance – sounds which seemed faint, but cut through the noise of the house's disintegration nevertheless.

These were sounds that I had heard before, in dreams that I had dreamed in my youth; I felt an instant thrill of recognition, accompanied by the sharpest dart of alarm I had been able to feel since I became a mechanized phantom.



17 As soon as the sinuous arm of shadow had enfolded me it snatched me up and pulled me into the stairwell, which now plunged into unimaginable depths. The sounds emitted by the shadow's heart grew no louder when the darkness robbed my eyes of sight, but the grinding noises which had earlier formed its background were eclipsed and the voices of the shadow seemed very distinct and oppressive. The living darkness clutched me more tightly and an unpleasant odour soon assaulted my nostrils, but it was the sounds that held my attention.

The awful familiarity of the muted voices called to mind the various descriptions of their quality that I had issued in my attempts to nurture the seeds of my nightmares into a literary crop. *The murmur of swine* was the label I had attached to it, although my choice of metaphor had been encouraged by the likeness I had chosen to symbolize the unhuman faces I often glimpsed in the same dreams.

Now, I realized that the sounds were much more complex than were ever made by earthly swine or any living animal. The louder elements were certainly describable as grunts and snorts, but they were set against a background far more high-pitched and seemingly plaintive, like that component of the voices of bats which is just about audible to the most sensitive human ears. Darkness still forbade me sight but I began to experience peculiar sensations of touch. I could not immediately judge whether their origin was within my substitute body or without. I seemed to be all a-tremble, but I could not tell whether I was shaking or *being shaken* by whatever invisible giant had clutched me in its fist. The oscillation might almost have been an oscillation of my very soul, but seemed to be a *resonant* oscillation: a harmonic response to the

throb of some greater entity into whose heart I was being delivered.

I had wondered before whether my vulnerability to nightmares might signify that my sleeping mind was, in some mysterious sense, a sensitive and finely-tuned instrument. When I felt that eerie vibration surging through me and possessing me, seeming to emerge from the innermost depths of my own being while also having its ultimate origin *elsewhere and elsewhere*, I began to think the analogy worth taking seriously. I began to imagine that soulbeat as drumming "music" played upon my instrumental form by alien hands: hands with an impossible clustering of fingers and a slug-like touch. The odour in my nostrils thickened as the noises became louder. It was a foul and musky animal odour with a hint of putrefaction and of something nauseatingly oily.

When sensations comparable to these had intruded upon my dreams in the past, they had been distant and tentative, terrifying only by virtue of the excessive capacity of my human flesh to manufacture terror. In that context, it had been easy for me to mistake their quality. Now that I could hear, feel and smell more distinctly, with the aid of a body far less vulnerable to the corruptions of fear, I realized that these manifestations were like nothing on Earth – nothing, at any rate, which had been on Earth when humans had thought themselves lords of the world.

The Engine had given me to understand that Consolidators and Transformers were machines like itself. Its talk of an Ultimate Engine whose body would comprise all the matter in the universe implied that it saw future evolution in purely mechanical terms – but I could not believe that what held me now was a machine. It was not *clean* enough. Although I had struggled, as a commonplace dreamer, to conceive it in organic terms, I knew now that it was not that either. It was not *really* a beast or a beast-god, although those were the truest representations I had been able to find in my restricted vocabulary of ideas.

I was not entirely surprised, when sight returned, to discover that the stimulus which had reawakened it was a distant cloud, luminous and numinous, and somewhat reminiscent of a closed eye.

If I have no words for it because no words exist, I thought defiantly, then I am perfectly entitled to apply whatever words may be convenient. If it is not actually a swine, that does not alter the fact that I have always tried to think of it in swinish terms. If that point of light into which I am falling is not a cloud or an eye, I have always thought of its like as clouds, and I may do so still. And when I see the eye within it begin to open....

I had drifted into that cloud before, as if borne

by the ship of dreams into an eerie bank of fog. I was certain, on the basis of past experience, that once I had been delivered into a world of strange light, I would finally be given means to see the face of the thing which had me.

Perhaps it was because I was expecting a face like a hog – or a swinish bat – that what first struck me about the monstrosity which emerged from the mist to confront me was its differences from those models. Its nose was not quite as leaf-like or as mucus-flooded as the snout I had imagined; its mouth was not as lipless or as toothy; its eyes were not as red or as round. I saw the face of my ultimate adversary as a composite and a caricature. It was not even a stable compound, for its colours and contours shifted by slow degrees, defying any attempt at fixed definition. But the eyes were staring at me; it held me for inspection. It was interested – perhaps even fascinated. And why not, given that it had gone to such extraordinary lengths in order to possess me?

I already knew, as I met that stare, that the world of actuality is far stranger than our limited senses can enable our tentative minds to imagine. The monster might be unnamable, unspeakable, unthinkable and any one of a hundred other groping adjectives, but in order to look at me, it had to cultivate eyes. In order to speak to me, it had to grow lips and a throat. In order to judge



'IT WAS STILL A CARICATURE.'

my chemical composition, it had to manifest a snout.

In all my childhood nightmares, the most horrible monsters of all had remained silent and indistinct – but those dreams had only been glimpses whose resonance had been accomplished over vast reaches of time. Now I had come to the wellspring of my worst nightmares, and the opportunity had finally come to interrogate their masters. The opportunity had also come for the masters of my nightmares to work their will upon me.

"What are you?" I demanded. I was glad to find that I could hear the spoken words quite clearly, and that my voice was the voice of an officer in the British army.

"Your saviour," the other replied, in a voice that was as blurred as its image, but not obviously swinish, "and the maker of that part of you which is the stuff of dreams."

I had written stories in which my father's God and Christ were replaced by the swinish entities of my nightmares, but I had sought thereby to disparage the folly of idolatry, not practise it. I had attempted, too, to reach behind the concept of matter, to imagine some further order of reality of which matter was a mere surface representation: an aether replete with magic, mystery and the ferment of Creation. Now, here I was, in the shadow-world of the aether, confronting an entity so vast and unbounded that it could hardly sustain a mask of matter and light.

"You are not God," I said, resentfully.

"I do not pretend to be a god," replied the other. I knew that if it could not settle its form of its own accord, then I must choose a fixative term of description. The choice was obvious and inevitable. When I had introduced my own detective, Carnacki, to a creature of this ilk, I had called it the Hog.

"Nor are you my saviour," I said. "The Engine did not intend to harm me."

"No – but it did intend to use you," the Hog said. Now that it had spoken it seemed less foul and ugly. Now that it had condescended to answer my challenge, it seemed a more ordinary enemy.

"And you do not?"

"Ah, but who has the better right? You know very well that there has always been an echo of my siren song in the frail shadow which you cast upon the face of time whenever you descended into deepest sleep. You knew me long before you discovered the Engine."

The Hog's voice, I realized, had settled into a nearly-plausible imitation of my own. It was a caricature, but it had something of my accent and mannerisms. To what extent, I wondered, was I the echo and the monster the original?

"You were the Engine's enemy all along," I said. "It never knew what it was fighting, although it never could understand how mere Consolidators were able to do what you did."

"I was never its enemy," the Hog replied. "I approve of the Engine for much the same reasons that the Engine approves of you. It was the Engine which went to war, when I first tried to claim you. It had no need."

"You are no Consolidator, then? You too are of the

devil's party – the party of cosmic anarchy."

The face was coming into focus now, and I was not surprised to see that there was something in it of my own face, albeit writ obscenely large – but it was still a caricature, still brutal, still *the Hog*. Behind its mask of matter and colour, it was the Behemoth of the Aether, the Beast of the last Revelation. All around us, the darkness was beginning to produce shadows, to set us within a kind of landscape. This, I knew, was the real Night Land.

"I have no sympathy with Consolidators," the Hog informed me, revelling in its condescension. "The Engine and I aim to maintain a certain level of uncertainty within the unfolding pattern of our inflationary domain, and we intend to take what opportunities we can to maintain that uncertainty at the most comfortable level. The principal differences between us are that I am cleverer, and far more durable."

"And my arrival in this time is merely an opportunity, which you have been clever enough to seize?"

"You arrival in this time is an opportunity which I was clever enough to create and manage. Do not diminish yourself by thinking that your odyssey has been a mere whim of chance."

The Engine had not expected my arrival any more than its known enemies had; it had reacted in a hasty and ill-considered fashion. The Hog, by contrast, had known that this moment would arrive and had prepared for it. My whole life – or that part of it, at least, that had been composed of dreams and nightmares – had been a kind of preparation for it. Even so, I considered myself a self-made man. If I had somehow been designed to be a good time-traveller, ideal for the purposes of whichever secret society had conscripted me, and whatever entity guided their exploits, I had completed and confirmed that shaping by working upon the raw material of my nightmares in such a way as to place them in the public arena. I was the author of *The Night Land* and Carnacki's as-yet-unpublished encounter with "The Hog." This Hog might have disturbed the rhythms of my soul with contrived uncertainties, but I was the one who had remained sane in spite of it.

"What do you want of me?" I demanded.

"Nothing more than I already have," the creature replied. "What I intended to accomplish, I have accomplished. We are merely awaiting the moment when you will fall backwards through time, to do the work I have appointed you to do – but I am as interested to see you as you must be to see me."

The tremor which had possessed me as I fell into this Pit had been no mere accident of transit. That, and the chorus of the swine, and the odour which had crept into the crevices of my exotic being, had all been parts of a process. The Engine's nanozoons had transformed my timeshadow once – and something of that transformation must have been intended to transfer itself to the body that lay asleep in a house in Ireland in 1918. Now, whatever instrument the Hog had that was cleverer than the nanozoons had redone their work – and the repercussions of that remaking would

be felt in my flesh and in my blood when I awoke.

"What have you done to me?" I asked, coldly.

"My dear Hope," said my magnified and distorted reflection, "you will discover what I have done to you soon enough. The question you ought to ask is why."

It had no right to call me Hope, however familiar it found me. I had no doubt that it knew me, and that in some sense it had *always* known me, but it had no right to appoint itself my mentor and guardian. It had no right to expect that because it had deigned to speak to me I would cease to conceive of it as a Hog or a Beast-god, or ameliorate my opinion of its hatefulness. But it did have a face and a voice, which had captured something of my own, and what it said was true.

"Why?" I asked.



18

The landscape whose appearance my captor was spinning from the shadows had become much clearer. It was not the Night Land of my earliest dreams; there were no Watchers, no Pits, and no Road Where the Silent Ones Walk disappearing into gleaming green mist. It was more like no-man's-land, pockmarked with craters where shells had burst and scattered with snaking remnants of barbed wire. Like the Hog itself, the landscape never became entirely still and stable. It continued to shift and change, as if incapable of certainty as to what it wanted to be.

The most remarkable thing about the vision was not its lack of solidity but its saturation with *feeling*. I recognized that from my dreams, but in my dreams I had never quite been able to understand how a landscape could be shot through with sadness and pain. Always, as a sleeping dreamer, I had appropriated those emotions myself, importing them into my own desperate heart as desolation, despair and grief. Here, insulated from any such error by my unnatural flesh, I realized that the misery and anguish were without and not within.

"The Engine has already tried to explain the nature of the universe to you," the Hog told me, when it had considered what it intended to say. "Given time, it would have spoken of four fundamental forces and the properties of space which allow these forces to become distinct, thus shaping the properties of matter and the so-called laws of nature. It would also have tried to explain the notion of the scalar fields which provide the context of the differentiation of the fundamental forces and the particles which mediate their operation. It is those scalar fields – not the luminous aether in which some scientists of your day still believed – which once provided the mechanism that allowed our region of space to inflate so vastly and so rapidly. The Engine might also have attempted to explain the concept of quantum fluctuations within the scalar field, but I doubt that you could have begun to grasp the meanings contained in those terms.

"It will be sufficient, I hope, for you to think in terms of uncertainties afflicting the transactions of the particles which make up atoms and permit the flow of

causality to extend backwards as well as forwards in time. Those uncertainties are irrelevant to almost all the measurements that can be made on the scale of human perception, but they are not irrelevant to the nature of human existence. The entity which has evolved from the captured timeshadow of Oscar Wilde attempted to contrast its mechanical experience with its former human experience in terms of an increase of stability and a consequent diminution of vulnerability to the vagaries of the flesh. The logical end-point of that process of diminution is the state of being which the Consolidators would like to achieve: perfect order, at every level of existence.

"The Engine has set itself against the Consolidators because it treasures its own uncertainties as humans treasure theirs – as a source of spontaneity – but the Consolidators who regard it as a traitor to machinekind have a case. If the logic of mental evolution did lead inexorably to a mechanical terminus, the Consolidators would be right to regard the Engine's affection for uncertainty as a mere atavism: an unfortunate residuum of the psychology of the fleshy beings which constructed their inevitable successors. If, in fact, the destiny of this domain is to bind all its matter into a single Universal Engine, which could and would take control of the scalar fields themselves, attaining the power to deflate and reinflate the entire domain, then the machine in question would certainly be a Consolidator."

What my monstrous captor was implying was that machines like the Engine were just as vainglorious as those men who had pride enough to think themselves made in God's image, and to deem themselves the best and final product of His Creation.

"What manner of being are *you*?" I asked, to show that I understood.

"Flesh is merely a particular type of matter which has the trick of reproducing itself," said the Hog. "Clever machinery draws all kinds of matter into that arena of growth, reproduction and evolution. But matter is not all there is to existence. The true aim of intelligence is to expand into the scalar fields themselves, and thrive on the most elementary uncertainties of all. The final beings will not be the sterile giants of the mechanical imagination but entities distributed within the scalar fields themselves, whose material aspects would be far livelier than anything you think of as living."

"You will forgive me," I said, "if I cannot quite see the difference."

"If I were actually God," the Hog replied, "you might indeed stand in need of forgiveness, but like you, I am of the other party. My name is Legion. My kind cannot be bound, as matter can, into increasingly vast structures. I am one with the corrosion that eats away at all such structures, the entropy which denies machines perpetual motion and perfect order. When I say that I am more durable than the Engine I do not mean that I am more stable. The Engine desires, in its modest way, to maintain endless change and endless creativity. I am endless change and endless creativity, and I am

one of an infinite host, which could dance in thousands upon the point of a needle or fill an entire inflationary domain. I am proud to take my place in the palace of Pandemonium which is the universe *entire*, shot through with inflationary domains by the billion, and calving more with every instant that passes. Order may aspire to Unity but Chaos loves multiplicity and confusion... and wherever Transformers take it upon themselves to reduce the uncertainty of causality's flow, to bind time to the cause of Consolidation, there are we to play the imp and restore the impetus of perversity. Imagine me, if you like, as a creature whose intellect is far more powerful than yours, but whose experience is far more passionate, not mechanical at all."

I looked around then, taking more careful note of the virtual landscape. The puzzle of its saturation by feeling had seemed trivial, but the Hog's attempted explanation put its desolation into a new light. Why, I wondered, was it so utterly bleak?

"You do not seem, on the whole, to be content with your lot," I said. "Indeed, you give the impression that this is Hell, and that you are never out of it."

"Yours is the viewpoint of a mortal being," the Hog replied. "Flesh tears and rots, and its primary sensation is pain, the harbinger of death. What you call good is merely anaesthetic, the absence of evil – which is why your successors thought the mechanical condition so desirable. For those who cannot die and have not abandoned the fires of passion, sensations are ranked in a very different way; all distinctions are aesthetic. From their viewpoint, your Heaven would be Hell, and your Hell merely the spectrum of available sensation. Even humans can treasure the bittersweetness of tragedy and the thrill of horror; there, if anywhere, you will find the beginnings of an understanding of the kind of being that I am, and the kind of being which will inherit the universe."

It was then, I think, that I got my first real inkling of the quality and rationale of the Hog's monstrousness – what my father would have called *the pride of Lucifer*. But it was a monster, and I was its instrument. If this enlightenment helped to save me from despair, still it could not save me from anguish. The landscape which surrounded me was still a war-spoiled no-man's-land, as fully saturate with death as with poignant sensation.

"We, not the machines, will eventually possess this domain," the Hog said. "The ultimate aim of Consolidation is closure and sterility, the Empire of the Inert. We are hogs, to be sure, relentless in our appetites, and we are demons too, in any reckoning like your father's – but we live, while you merely exist. It is only in your dreaming, at its wildest, that you ever really live; wakefulness destroys your capacity for authentically vivid thought. In the end, we shall fill this domain, and all the other domains before and after it, because we are the ones who are properly in tune with the nature of the universe. You, my dear Hope, will play your part in that process of inheritance, helping us to undo the knots tied by lesser meddlers, thus to

extend the paradoxical security of uncertainty back into the remotest reaches of local time: eras long preceding the emergence of our best and final brilliance."

"Do I have a choice?" I asked, more than a trifle bitterly.

"No – and yes," said the Hog teasingly. "Like every being that has ever existed or ever will you are a helpless victim of circumstance, and much that will happen to you now will be no more subject to your own whim than almost everything that has happened to you already. Within that frame of destiny, however, there has always been uncertainty, and always will be. There is always a measure of freedom to be won, and used, and cherished. You are my instrument, but you will have choices aplenty to make while you serve my purpose in the obscure shadows of prehistory."

What would have been the point in crying out against my fate? What profit would there have been in loudly damning that impious reflection of myself to Hell? Was it not in Hell already, and very glad of it? And was it not, in its own way, trying with all its might to make the Hell that I was in just a little more bearable – not by promising me some impossible Heaven, but by telling me the truth about my own nature and the limitations of my kind?

Even then, I could not help but formulate the last defensive thought; it had become a hardened reflex, an automatic ritual.

This is all a dream! I told myself, yet again. *It is not real.*

But dreams are real; they are part and parcel of our experience of life. There is no better test of any one of us than *what we can imagine*. That, far better than what we actually say or do under the pressure of the expectation of our neighbours, is the measure of our attainment as thinking beings.

What I actually said to the Hog, before I fell back into time, was: "I am not afraid."

"Nor am I," replied my imitator, "but times will come when you and I, separated by the ages, shall break upon the thrill of terror, before we find ourselves whole again – and we shall be all the better, and all the wholer, for having broken. Try to be glad, when you can, that you have seen me, and understood me insofar as you can."

I heard no more.



19 When I awoke again, it seemed that all the evils of the world had fled, leaving naught but Hope behind – but I was not the man that I had been, if I could still be reckoned a man at all.

I awoke in half-familiar surroundings, lying in the same bed in the same dingy room where I had lain for days before receiving the miraculous injection. They were, however, only *half-familiar*, because they seemed so mean and absurd that I could hardly bring myself to believe in them.

The curtains were closed but bright daylight filtered around their edges, and there was light enough to see

by. I must have moved and groaned long before I had presence of mind enough to force my eyes open, because I felt the touch of soothing fingers on my brow.

Soothing fingers! As if the touch of a fleshy human hand could soothe away the kind of dream that I had suffered!

When I opened my eyes at last there were two people already bending over me: the grey-eyed nurse named Helen and an orderly in a corporal's uniform. I heard the corporal tell the nurse to see to me before he turned away and left the room. There was a pitcher of water ready on the bedside table; she poured a little into a cup and used her left hand to help me raise my head from the pillow, so that I might drink.

I wanted to thank her as kindly as I could, but the words would not come. She told me that she would fetch some porridge from the kitchen. As she departed the corporal returned with Captain MacLeod and General Hartley. The corporal had a notebook and pencil ready, in order that he might serve as an amanuensis. From now on, anything that I said was valuable intelligence, news of the world to come. I still had no idea whether their aim was to protect that world or to obliterate it – but what I did know was that the decision was out of their hands. I was a puppet now, disjointedly dancing out the whimsical commands of a very different general.

"Lieutenant Hodgson! It's good to have you back again!" The captain's Scottish burr was oddly reassuring – but there must have been something in the glare of my eyes that he found far less than reassuring, for he hesitated as he came to greet me. I was still struggling to sit up, but the hand he reached out to help me stopped short, and I had to yank my arm out from beneath the blanket in order to grasp it and pull myself up.

"Easy, man!" said the general. "We have all the time in the world."

But he did not have all the time in the world. He had no time at all. I had only just taken hold of MacLeod's hand, but he was already trying to tear it out of my grip. I do not know what he felt, but it alarmed him considerably. When I resisted the removal he hauled back with all his might – and when I consented to release him he staggered back uncontrollably, cannoneering into the startled corporal.

"Fool!" said the general. "What's the matter with you?"

Regaining his balance, MacLeod lifted his hand to look at the palm, and I saw his eyes grow wide with horror. The general realized his error, and grabbed the captain by the wrist, turning the palm so that he too could look at it. All that I could see from where I lay was that MacLeod's palm and wrist had darkened; in the dim light I

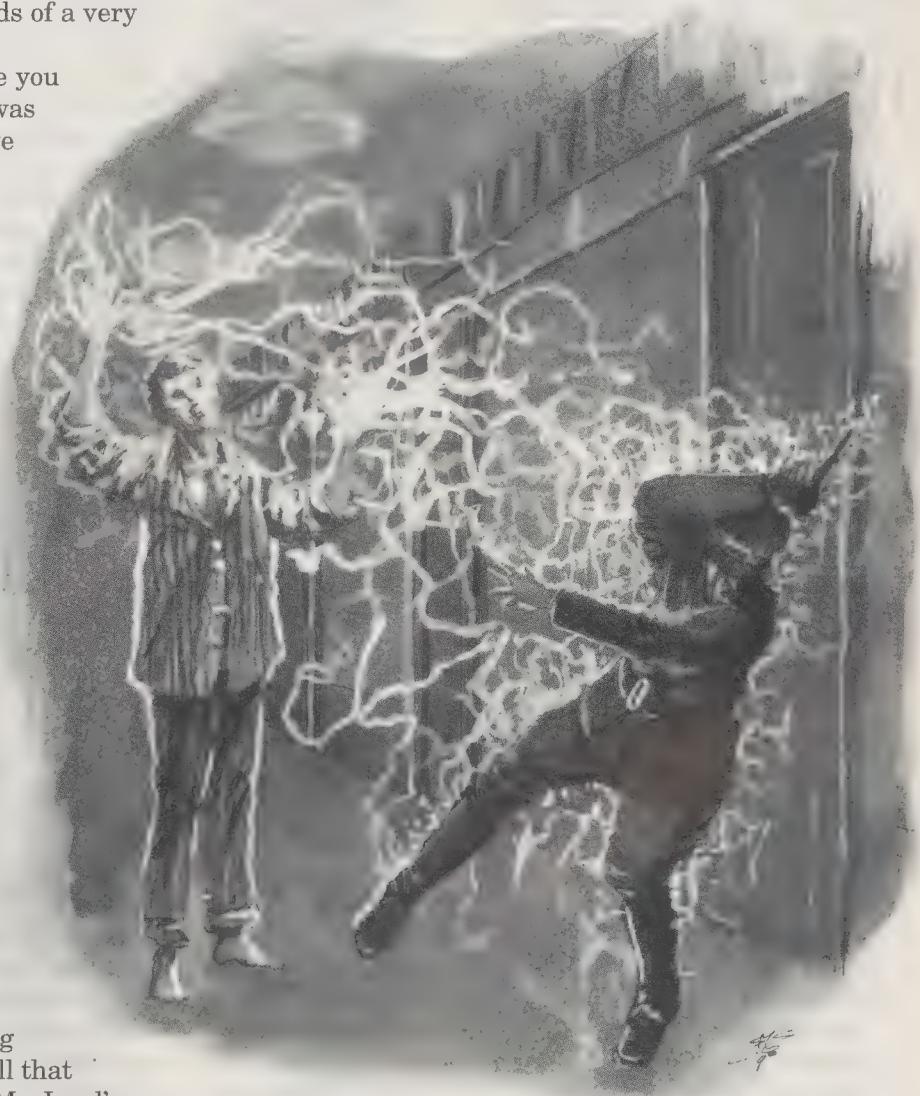
could not tell whether it was bruising, blood or some unholier kind of darkness. I knew that it did not matter; I had been transformed, and now must play the Transformer in my turn. The time for questions, answers and explanation was done; there was nothing left now but animal brutality, swift and sure and horribly bloody. *Flesh tears and rots, and its primary sensation is pain, the harbinger of death.*

Captain MacLeod was in pain, and death was surging through him like a tide of darkness

"What is it?" the general demanded, anxiously. He too was flesh and blood; for all his rank, he had not the fortitude of a machine. His anxiety was already turning to terror.

MacLeod did not answer; he did not know. He only knew that he was doomed – and he began to scream.

The general moved his own hand from the sleeve of the captain's tunic to the flesh of the afflicted wrist. I saw the shadow spread from the captain's flesh to the general's, and knew that whatever plague had infected me was cleverer and more avid by far than any scourge of the trenches. The captain screamed again, the awful sound part curse and part howl of anguish. It was like the scream of an animal brought to the slaughterhouse



'THE ANGEL OF DEATH.'

and panicked before it could be stunned. Hartley would not deign to cry out like that, but the same anguish was inscribed upon his features as he turned his accusative eyes on me. The corporal was backing away, ready to bolt – but he dared not do so. Whether or not the so-called general was properly entitled to the uniform he wore, military discipline was in force here.

"What have you done?" whispered the general, dropping MacLeod's wrist and staring at his own.

"I?" I croaked. "The question is: what have you done?" He, after all, was the man who had sent me forth to become accursed.

I dare say that I *could* have been changed in such a way that whatever I touched dropped dead upon the instant, without the merest twinge of pain, but that was not the Hoggish way. As the infection took fuller hold of the captain and the general their features began to *flow*. Their faces dissolved, losing the forms in which they had long been moulded, becoming something far less certain – and, eventually, far less human. The general's face only displayed one set of features at a time, but none of them could settle into full possession. First he was one man, then another, then a third – and then he was not a man at all but something like a wolf, and something like a bat... and even, in the end, something like a pig. I had been tricked and used by the shapeshifter race which hid among mankind. Somehow, their descendants in the future had contrived to divert Copplestone's discovery into other hands. Although its use was a human prerogative, they had sought to employ it to their own ultimate advantage, never suspecting for a moment that there might be others waiting in more distant futures with advantages of their own to calculate.

The agonized captain, covering his face with his hands, lurched into the terrified corporal for a second time, and the darkness leapt from one to another with the same vicious hunger. The corporal's features never dissolved, but I dare say that he felt no less pain on that account. He died, and died horribly, screaming like the captain. Even the general's whisper turned to a whimper as he sank to his knees, and became a plaintive animal wail as his mind confronted the certainty of his destruction.

I heard running feet, and more screams. The door opened, but my room was not the only place to which anxious helpers were hurrying. Wherever the dutiful Helen had gone, she had carried the plague in the tenderly solicitous fingers she had touched to my brow.

I knew that I had to get out of the house. Weak as I still was, I kicked the blankets away and lowered my bare feet to the stone floor. When I looked down at my pyjama-clad form I seemed far thinner than I had been before, but I could not be astonished by that. I knew as I came to my feet that I was very feeble, and that any carelessly-delivered blow of a fist or forearm would probably knock me down – but the newcomer who had hustled into the room with urgent concern required but a single sweeping glance to see that the other three were cowering away from me, terrified even as the

flesh shrivelled on their faces. When I moved to pass him, he let me go.

Once I was in the corridor, progress was not so easy. The hypocrite who had let me pass yelled "Stop him!" after me, and contrived to make himself heard even above the screeching of his companions. There was another officer at the end of the dim-lit corridor: a lieutenant who probably had not the least idea what was going on, but knew what to do when a man came out of a room from which screams of agony were audible, to the accompaniment of such a desperate command.

The lieutenant drew his revolver and pointed it at me. He ordered me to stand still. I held up my hands, in the recognized gesture of surrender. From the palms there burst forth a terrific light. I squeezed my eyes tightly shut an instant before the blast, but red fire surged through my eyeballs and imprinted itself within my brain, helping me to imagine what the lieutenant must have seen. He must have seen an angel, all light and glory: the angel of death.

The lieutenant probably screamed, and his scream was probably as closely akin to the cry of a wounded beast as all the others, but there were so many screams by now – such an awful chorus of crazed swine – that I could not separate his from all the rest. I was sick of screams, and I refused to hear them any more. I stood still for a full half-minute, with my closed eyes still dazzled, before I realized that there was a fire without as well as within, and that the task of escaping the house had become even more urgent than before.

I ran. I did not open my eyes, but I ran unerringly, and very fast. I burst out of the front door without pausing; I do not know whether it was luck alone that allowed me to find it standing open, or whether the godlike powers of the Hog extended even to that contrivance during the few awful moments of their flaring. Whether by luck or by kindness, the fact is that I reached the path outside the door, and staggered to the gate. I collapsed beside the road, with the garden wall between my despicably frail flesh and the brightly burning building, so that I was shielded from the heat and the exploding bullets.

By the time I could see clearly, there was little enough to be seen. There was nothing left of my erstwhile captors but black ash and calcined bone.



20

The people who found me, fed me and gave me clothing could not understand why I begged them, at first, not to touch me or approach too close. When they discovered, under the pressure of their generosity, that my fears were groundless they were confirmed in their hesitant hypothesis that I must be mad.

They brought me to a village on the western shore of Lough Mask, to the house of the local landowner. I gave my real name to his servants, but I must have seemed so dubious about it that when he had investigated, and had been directed by official channels to the

obituary which had appeared in the *Times* on the second of May, he had no doubt at all that I was wrong.

I could, of course, have proved my identity by going back to England. There were a hundred people there who knew me, many of whom must have mourned my supposed passing. Even now, there is something in me which urges me to return to my wife, and curses me for my cowardice in failing to do so. But it was not merely cowardice that restrained me.

I was a deserter, of course; it did not take me long to ascertain that General Anthony Somerton Hartley was alive and as well as could be expected of any man in his position. My orders had come from an impostor, of whom no trace was left.

I know that I am not the man I was. The plague and fire of Hell that the Hog planted within me has not shown itself since the day of my return from the world of twelve million years hence, but I dare not assume that it is dead. My perpetual fear is, and has to be, that the Hog's legacy is lying dormant within me and will surely manifest itself again in circumstances not of my choosing.

I do not know whether I would have fared any better had I remained in the charge of the Engine. I never heard what bargain it intended to offer me, and never had the opportunity to find out whether it would have dealt with me honestly and fairly. Nor do I know where the right of the matter truly lies, and whether I might have found the best duty of all in the service of the Consolidators. The fact is that I am the hapless instrument of the great god Pan, the deliverer of panic.

I am possessed by demons, and every good deed I might attempt is in danger of arbitrary and impish subversion. I am a man, but in the core of my soul is the Crawling Chaos, which uses me to stir the waters of time's weary river.

I am uncertainty personified, a germ of future histories in which order and mechanism will flourish only to fail, having begun to die even before they began to live.

Perhaps that is the cause which all living beings ought to favour, and the side to which all of life implicitly belongs, but I do not know. I do not know whether it would be a good thing to live for a million years and more as a machine – however carefully its appetites might be preserved – but I do recall what I said to Oscar Wilde when he asked for my provisional judgment on that question.

It would be good to have the opportunity.

I still believe that it would be good to have the opportunity to return to the future in which I was briefly captive, to live as Wilde was able to live – but it would be good to have other opportunities too. Perhaps there are many opportunities still open to me, including the opportunity to be further astonished. Perhaps the Hog is as mistaken as the Engine and the Consolidators were in believing that it is the final product of evolution and the heir to the universe; the reflexive tremors of causality which flow towards the present from futures aeons hence might yet erase all of us, and mount experiments in being that are inconceivable to

all our fugitive kinds.

I often wish, of course, that no burdensome legacy of the tentative step I took through the Gateway of Eternity remained to me, but I am glad that I am not ignorant of what I am *and why*. Some might consider my condition a curse, but I cannot. I have never been one to hide from the darkest import of my dreams; my lust has always been to know, no matter how frightful the revelation might be. Knowledge is the enemy of fear, and there is nothing so terrible that it does not become less so when it is known – and understood, insofar as it can be understood.

I am glad that I remember, even though I remember more than I should.

I remember every word of those manuscripts I read in the Archive of Mankind, and every detail of my confrontation with the Hog, *and I have other memories too*. I do not know exactly how I came by them, but I refuse to be devastated by their haunting presence.

I do not know whether every member of the secret society which chose me as their pawn was destroyed in the fire that followed my return, but I dare not assume it. I have every reason to suspect that the remainder of its members would be very anxious to talk to me, if they knew that I had survived. Nor do I know whether the entire supply of Copplestone's drug was destroyed; but I dare not assume that either. What I do know is that more could be made, if there were ever reason enough to make it. I know that *because I remember how to do it*. I never had the least inkling, before the drug was given to me, what its constituents might be, let alone how to measure and mix them, but I know it now.

By virtue of that false memory, I know that I shall not always be alone with my curse. I am merely the germ of future histories: a single cell that will divide, and divide again. I am the Beginning, and in me is the End – or, rather, the lack of one.

Occasionally, I remember other things that I never knew before. When I sleep, I often have dreams in which all kinds of revelations become clear to me, and though I forget them when I wake again I have reason enough to suspect that they may still be somewhere inside me, awaiting the cue that will bring them to full consciousness.

I do not yet know more than the merest part of what is in me, and I do not know what might spark its release. All I know for sure is that I am not the man I once was, and must be careful who I now pretend to be. It seems ironic now that I once asked Oscar Wilde's simulacrum whether he suffered the same afflictions that soured the lives of other immortals, according to the popular legends of accursed wanderers. I am an accursed wanderer of sorts myself now, and I have never felt an hour's tedium; I could count it a luxury if I had. I have no reason to think that my frail flesh is anything but mortal, but I do know a certain way to cheat death.

Although Wilde's simulacrum was probably destroyed in the Hog's attack, which plucked me from the heart of the Engine's defences, I shall not neces-

sarily find myself in a future in which I shall be condemned to remain alone. It seems far likelier that I shall find myself in a very different situation – and there is a certain ironic comfort in the fact that I do not know. My father would consider it monstrous that I can take delight in the uncertainty of my salvation, but I am of the devil's party now, and I know it.

Perhaps I should have tried harder before now to fight against my fate, but one cannot be forearmed until one is forewarned. I will try harder, in future, to give history a shove in *my* preferred direction. The Hog assured me, after all, that there is scope for my own will to operate, and the assurance must have been meant as an invitation.

The world is a bleak place and the future is a Night Land from which men will ultimately disappear — but the Gateway of Eternity stands open, if only to the mind's eye. We cannot pass through it as living beings, but our dream-selves can look out into the furthest realms of possibility. Nothing is hidden from our imagination, provided that we do not blind and fetter ourselves with *faith*. There is



much that we can do, not only in the here and now but on the greater stage of the Ages and the Aeons.

I have the precious formula; all I need before I begin my own experiment in uncertainty is a man or woman with an imagination whose range equals or surpasses my own. I do not doubt that the world will produce such men, given time; why else would I be writing these pages?

I go by a different name now, and not always the same one, but no matter how much I have changed there is something in me whose true name is and always will be Hope.

No matter what evils fly about the world of men
while I watch and wait, before and after the
death and decay of my flesh, I will be
here.

Brian Stableford's most recent trilogy of sf novels consisted of *Salamander's Fire*, *Serpent's Blood* and *Chimera's Cradle* – the three "Books of Genesys" (Orbit, 1995-1997). Also published recently were his stand-alone novel *Inherit the Earth* (Tor, 1998) and his non-fiction collection *Yesterday's Bestsellers: A Journey through Literary History* (Borgo Press, 1998).

interzone

The leading British magazine which specializes in SF and new fantastic writing.
Among many other writers, we have published

BRIAN ALDISS RAMSEY CAMPBELL GARRY KILWORTH
JOHN SLADEK J.G. BALLARD RICHARD COWPER
DAVID LANGFORD BRIAN STABLEFORD
IAIN BANKS JOHN CROWLEY MICHAEL MOORCOCK
BRUCE STERLING BARRINGTON BAYLEY
THOMAS M. DISCH RACHEL POLLACK LISA TUTTLE
GREGORY BENFORD MARY GENTLE KEITH ROBERTS
IAN WATSON MICHAEL BISHOP WILLIAM GIBSON
GEOFF RYMAN CHERRY WILDER DAVID BRIN
M. JOHN HARRISON BOB SHAW GENE WOLFE

interzone has introduced many excellent new writers, and illustrations, articles, interviews, film and book reviews, news, etc.

interzone is available from specialist bookshops, or by subscription.

For six issues, send £17 (outside UK, £20, USA \$32).
 For twelve issues, send £32 (outside UK, £38, USA \$60)
Single copies: £3.00 inc. p&p (outside UK, £3.50, USA, \$6)
Outside Europe, all copies are despatched by accelerated
surface mail.

To: **interzone** 217 Preston Drove, Brighton, BN1 6FL, UK

三

Address

If the address is different from the above, please include it on a separate sheet.

Please send me six/twelve issues of Interzone beginning with the current issue.

enclose a cheque/no a/c

international money order

International money is
made payable to Inter-

(delete as applicable)

OR please charge my MasterCard/Visa:

Expiry date / Signature

Has the epic fantasy had its day? The blockbuster tale of a magical world has been commonplace now for at least 20 years. Eddings, Jordan and the like may still sell by the truckload, but reviewers, confronted with "Book One of..." yet another trilogy, are often wary – especially if there's a map in the front. But to object to the basic properties of a genre is hardly fair play. "Who cares who murdered Roger Ackroyd?" Edmund Wilson once asked, but most crime reviewers don't begin by complaining about yet another detective, yet another murder. Genre novels resemble other genre novels, and that's the point of them.

But not quite. If genres need to repeat themselves, they also need to evolve. Epic fantasy is often felt to be an especially conservative genre, all faded props and stale fustian, rather as if it were an old-time rep company bent on recycling forever the same cardboard castles, the same rusty swords, the same moth-eaten cowls. If fantasy is to thrive, it needs fresh, original voices.

Ricardo Pinto's first novel, *The Chosen* (Bantam, £16.99) is a thick book with a map – three, in fact – and the first volume of a trilogy. So far, so predictable; there's a young hero, and – in an opening reminiscent more of *Dune* than *Lord of the Rings* – we soon find he's off on a journey, but it's not a quest. By the end of the novel, he's found love, but his lover is another boy. This, moreover, is a fantasy novel without prophecies, spells or evil enchanters. There are no battles, no thick forests, no magical rings or swords. This is no nostalgic vision of pre-industrial Europe; instead, we have a highly structured and cruel society which appears to have its roots in Chinese, Indian and Polynesian cultures, but cannot be seen as a simple reflection of any real historical period.

The Commonwealth of the Three Lands is a society based obsessively on caste; the "chosen" of the title are those of particularly pure blood, who rule over their supposed inferiors with a savage ruthlessness. At the apex of this society is a God-Emperor who is elected by the pure-blooded, or Masters, in a papal-style conclave. Now the God-Emperor is dying; factions are forming, and the hero's father, who has lived in exile for many years, must return to the capital to take part in the election. A long and nightmarish journey follows.

Growing up on a distant island, 15-year-old Carnelian has learnt little of life on the mainland, and is soon shocked by what he sees – especially by the behaviour of the Masters. The novel charts the boy's increasing dis-

Is He Among the Chosen?

Tom Arden

BOOKS



REVIEWED

illusionment with the society of which he is destined, it seems, to become a favoured member.

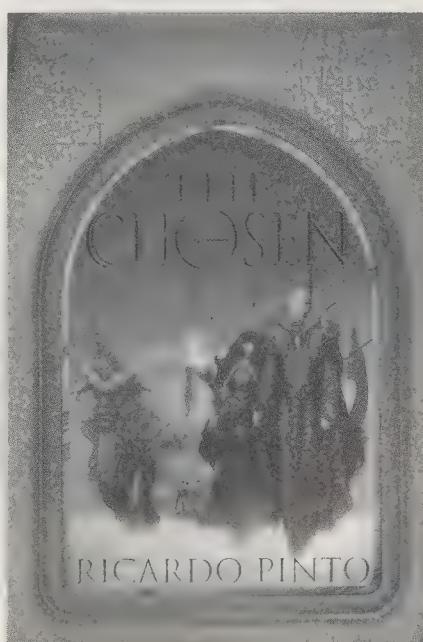
Pinto is particularly good at describing his imaginary world, a world of unusual complexity which he presents entirely through the eyes of his young hero, without any of the customary prologues, appendices or info-dumps so favoured of fantasy novelists. If the figurative language can be a little dubious – "Like ice on a spring river the crowd broke into chunks and began to drift forward along the road" (p221) – this is at least a novel rich in imagery. The imagery is matched by innumerable ornate, strange imaginings, such as a beach on which every pebble has

been intricately carved, or a vast, dark, labyrinthine library in which texts are recorded on lengths of "beadcord," to be felt through the fingers. As they rise in wisdom, the scholars whose task it is to read these texts are systematically deprived of all senses but touch:

When they have achieved the highest wisdom that is allowed to those with eyes and ears, they are locked away. Each eye is sliced out like a stone from a peach. The red spirals of their hearing are cored from their heads and the fleshy shells shorn off. Cautious inhalations burn away their smelling and afterwards the useless meat of their nose is discarded. Their tongues are drawn out and harvested like the saffrons of a crocus. Once his mutilations are complete, a Sapien is left only feet and hands as the primary organs of his perception. Remote from seductive sensation, they can be entrusted with the deeper secrets. (pp365-6)

Oh, and they've been castrated as well. In its intricacy, its grotesquerie – and its slightly shaky grammar – this passage is typical of Pinto's style.

The book has several problems. Frequently, the mixture is just too rich. Pinto's strongest talents are his visual power, and his ability to construct a complex society in detail, with all its rules and rituals, prejudices and perversities. One has no doubt that he sees, like a film unfolding in his mind, every stage of his hero's journey, but journeys are seldom as interesting as arrivals – unless, that is, they are punctuated by confrontations of major consequence for the plot. Well over half



the novel has elapsed before we reach the capital city; for too long we are simply travelling, travelling, travelling. We learn, several times, how awful the Masters are, but not much else is really happening, and the characters are never as vivid as the environment through which they move. Later, the gay love theme is handled freshly and unselfconsciously, but little passion is conveyed in the writing (and there's no explicit sex). As

Commercial fantasy is a literature of the backward glance, sugar-coated soap operas yearning for worlds better than any that have actually existed. Just as romantic novels cast a roseate glow over the past, as scrupulously avoiding stinks and plagues as a 17th-century dower with a posy pressed to her nose, so triple-decker fantasies too often conjure hyperreal theme-parks full of spectacle but bereft of true human pain or joy or peril, and ignore the inhuman darkness which lurks at the heart of fantasy's wild wood.

The best modern fantasies are not content to merely regild the past, but redraft its maps and its stories, and revive that sense of dangerous darkness. And although most of his work has been published in the form of serial comics or graphic novels, Neil Gaiman has proven to be one of the most innovative fantasy writers working today, adept at braiding modern idioms and traditional fantasy tropes within this notoriously conservative industry. His latest work, *Stardust* (Spike, \$22), is a fairy tale which exists, like its imagined town, in a chink between reality and imagination, telling a story whose wholly traditional narrative devices are redeemed by Gaiman's strong and distinctive voice.

Although the bowdlerizers of the Grimm Brothers and the authors of innumerable cute elf stories have prettified Faerie beyond recognition, Gaiman pays homage to its origins in the oral traditions set down by the Grimm Brothers and elaborated in Christine Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist*. Gaiman's Faerie is a place of raw story, with bloody retribution awaiting those who transgress, however unwittingly, its complex unwritten etiquette: a wilderness of anarchic imagination nicely contrasted with the nostalgically prim and correct rural town which abuts it, in which life is regulated by custom and strict social mores.

The town is Wall, somewhere in England, backed onto a wall and hedged by wild forest. In the wall of

for women, for much of the book there are no female characters at all, and most of those we meet are servants or slaves, given dialogue along the lines of "Yes, young master." But the novel ends on a striking cliffhanger, and readers patient enough to finish the book will certainly look forward to the second volume.

If Pinto could do the characters as well as the setting, *The Chosen* would

be a novel of unusual brilliance, a sort of Oriental *Gormenghast*; as it is, this is a boldly conceived and intelligently written fantasy which lingers in the memory like a strange and disturbing dream. While it attracts writers capable of such elaborate, bejewelled imaginings, there's still life left in the epic fantasy.

Tom Arden

Visit Tom Arden's Home Page:
<http://www3.mistral.co.uk/tom.arden/>

Storyville

Paul J. McAuley

Wall is a gate customarily guarded by the town's inhabitants, and beyond the gate is a meadow at the border of Faerie, on which no mortal may tread except during the fair, which is held every nine years. While Victoria is still new to the throne, Dunstan Thorne is seduced by a woman of Faerie during one of these fairs. Although he afterwards marries his human sweetheart, a halfling child is delivered to them nine months later; *Stardust* is the story of this halfling, Tristran Thorne.

At 17, believing the beautiful Victoria Forester to be his heart's desire, Tristran pledges to find a star they both see falling beyond the wall, and ventures for the first time into the land of his birth. He locates the fallen star quickly enough, but discovers that she is a recalcitrant young woman made even more irritable by the leg she broke in falling. And he also learns that she is sought not only by Tristran, but also by the last three surviving sons of the dead Lord of Stormhold, for she is key to their inheritance, and also by one of the witchy Lilim, who wish to use her heart to restore their youth.

The story is swift, clever and nicely told (Gaiman's carefully wrought prose is resonant with a nostalgic throb that only rarely slips into cuteness), and self-consciously set in a place which is a refuge for the unknowable from the pragmatism of the mundane world. It is essentially a traditional quest in which the protagonist is transformed not by gaining his prize but by understanding himself. And in its powerful evocation of the tropes of fairy tales it is very traditional; it does not, for instance, extend to the recent feminist recasting of fairy tales, as exemplified by the

works of Angela Carter, Ursula Le Guin or Jane Yolen. In Gaiman's story, women are either objects of romantic desire or fearsome avatars of Faerie's dark power, although in the end they prove more enduring than the often hapless male characters.

Gaiman's depiction of Faerie's geography and inhabitants will not be unfamiliar to those who enjoyed his *Sandman* series or his graphic novel *The Book of Magic*, which leads me to end with this caveat. For although his publishers are remarkably coy about this, *Stardust* was first published by DC Comics as an illustrated novel in four parts, in collaboration with the artist Charles Vess. It is presented in this edition without Vess's pictures, but if you missed its first incarnation, it is highly recommended.

Sherri S. Tepper began her career with fairly straightforward fantasy trilogies, but has increasingly explored a shifting area which mixes elements of both fantasy and science fiction. Her later novels – from a retelling of the Sleeping Beauty story (featuring an eruption of 21st-century time-travellers) in *Beauty*, to the loose science-fiction trilogy of *Grass*, *Raising the Stones* and *Sideshow* – are tough-minded parables about the ways in which human ignorance (usually male) can threaten the subtle harmonies of nature. *Six Moon Dance* (Avon Eos, \$23) extends this theme.

It's set on the colony world of Newholme, where the eponymous six moons of the title are about to line up in the sky, volcanic activity is threatening to destroy the colonists' precarious foothold, and a visitation by the Questioner from the Council of Worlds may in any event condemn them. Newholme's society is one of denial, relying on the illegal use of the labour of human-like (although apparently brainless) natives, Timmys, while elaborately avoiding acknowledgement of their existence. Further, the ruling class of women is concealing a secret concerning the reason why there are so many more men than women, and no one wants

to think about what may have happened to the first colonists, a bunch of ruthless male pirates.

Aided by two dancers recruited from Earth, and Mouche, a spirited and clever boy training to be one of the consolatory consorts of married women, the Questioner soon finds that the planet holds more secrets than those of its human inhabitants. The entire ecology is a Gaian superorganism of which the Timmys are only a part, and the wanton hunting of one manifestation of this organism could mean destruction of the world, for there is a monster at its heart which must be appeased at every conjunction of the six moons.

Like most of Tepper's sf, *Six Moon Dance* mixes speculative ecology with convincingly detailed and richly strange societies. Her depiction of Newholme, in which men are mostly but not entirely subservient to women, is underpinned by some shrewd observations on human nature, and is inhabited by a large cast of plausible characters, notably a monstrous murderer and the pragmatic keeper of the brothel in which Mouche is undergoing his training. Indeed, the story of Mouche's education is the best part of the book, being a very astute and very funny inversion of picaresques such as *Moll Flanders*. By comparison, the adventures of the Questioner, and the subsequent descent of most of the characters into the bowels of the planet at the behest of what can only be described as its godhead, is increasing driven by routine plotting and some very contrived coincidences, albeit tricked out with some superbly imaginative flourishes, including the horribly apt fate of the hapless and brutal first colonists. But Tepper dances us through intricacies and improbabilities with insouciance, blending allegory and colourful planetary romance in a toothsome novel you want to devour at a sitting.

While Sherri S. Tepper attacks her targets with stinging accuracy, Jack McDevitt's disaster epic, *Moonfall* (HarperCollins, £16.99), has a thundering blunderbuss of a plot which goes off with an impressive bang, but wastes much of the material crammed into it. It is early in the next century. A brand new moonbase is about to be opened by the Vice-President (as in much American sf, the hegemony of the last superpower has spread to all corners of the Earth) when a very fast and very large comet is discovered to be heading straight for the Moon. Slightly more than half of the book is taken up with this discovery and the mechanics of

the evacuation from the Moon of a large number of people at short notice; the rest concerns the effect of large chunks of moonrock raining down upon the Earth.

All disaster novels, sf or not (and this one is not packaged as sf, although that's what it clearly is), have the same arc: a build-up of tension and introduction of a large cast who will act as witnesses to the disaster which winnows them to survivors who must then seek to rebuild civilization. And so here. McDevitt's central idea is clever and underpinned with satisfying verisimilitude, but it is rather woodenly presented, and he compounds the problem-of-plot by continuing to add and kill off characters long after the disaster strikes; one grows less and less interested in plodding through pointless passages introducing what might just as well be crash-test dummies. If you like big cosmic disasters then you'll probably like this, but don't expect any surprises.

There's a lot of thud and blunder in sf, and J. R. Dunn's *Full Tide of Night* (Avon Eos, \$14) is so self-consciously low-key that one wants to like it just for that, even if at times it stalls on its own inertia. Borrowing the bones of its plot from John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*, with the exception of a single scene and some flashbacks it stubbornly cleaves to one set and a plot that spans only a few days, even though it is dealing with a revolution that threatens a whole planet. As a result, Dunn almost, but not quite, stifles his story before he can deliver it.

The planet Midgard was settled a century ago under the direction of Julia, the Lady Amalfi. She is a figure of legendary power to the colonists, who, like the plants and animals, were grown by Julia and her Artificial Intelligence servant from stored ova and seeds. Various factions of the colonists have rebelled against Julia, and their ragged and ill-disciplined army have captured the scientific centre from which she rules. At almost the same moment, the AI, which has the volatile personality of a troubled adolescent girl, has made contact with the first ship from Earth to arrive since the colony was founded – a ship which Julia fears carries the Erinye, beings who left their humanity behind for an existence in virtual reality, and from which she fled as they threatened to destroy all that was human in the Solar System.

Dunn is not concerned with the usual heroic gestures or fantastic alien landscapes of a planetary romance

(alien animals are shocking intrusions into landscapes remade by Julia's terraforming), but with the subtle psychological games by which dominance is established. At the centre of the novel is the five-cornered drama between the paranoid and imperious Julia, her rebellious AI, Keth Fredrix, leader of the fanatically doctrinist Rigorists, Dan Carndale, a former student of Julia's who now wants to supplant her, and Tony Perin, who slowly takes up leadership of the non-Rigorist rebels. Despite its very slow beginning, its self-imposed limitations and a bit of *deus ex machina* neatness at the end, this quietly ambitious story of intrigue and quiet heroism does begin to grip as Perin's stature grows. One wonders what Dunn might be capable of if he works with instead of so resolutely against the form he has chosen to inhabit.

Slowly and steadily, the NESFA Press has become one of the best sf-orientated small presses. From producing books celebrating the works of guests-of-honour at their conventions (NESFA is the New England Science Fiction Association), it has diversified into publishing sturdy, scrupulously researched and beautifully produced collections of fiction by authors who are less well-remembered than they should be. Recent publications have included collections of the complete short fiction of Cyril Kornbluth and Cordwainer Smith, and a corrected edition of Smith's only sf novel, *Norstrilia*, previously published in two short halves with a clumsy abridgement. To hand is a book celebrating the 50-year career of Charles L. Harness, *An Ornament to His Profession* (NESFA Press, \$25). Harness is perhaps best remembered for his novella *The Rose*, and that is what leads off a diverse collection of stories. Some reflect Harness's long career as a lawyer specializing in chemical patents (of which the funniest and most acute is "The Alchemist"); others are variations on the standard themes of time travel, space opera and psi; all are packed with ideas, and celebrate, often with touching tenderness, the strength of human spirit. While a certain overwrought quality of the prose and an abundance of pipe-smoking Professors and other clichés sometimes reflects the pulp origins of the early tales, in the hectic fevers of his driven characters, the intricacy of his plots, and the fricative fireworks of ideas clashing against each other, Harness is matched only by Alfred Bester. Recommended.

Paul J. McAuley

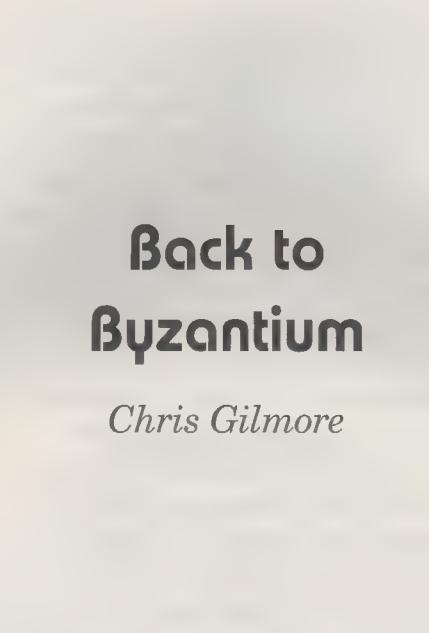


Reviewing – indeed, raving over Guy Gavriel Kay's *The Lions of Al-Rassan* in *Interzone* 101, I commented that though the book was on the longish side, I wished there was more of it. The same goes for *Sailing to Sarantium* (Earthlight, £16.99 and £9.99) for an even stronger reason: it's the first of a two-volume job called *The Sarantine Mosaic*, of which the second volume will presumably be called *Sarantium*, to maintain the analogy with Yeats's famous poem-pair.

The Byzantium of Justinian and Theodora, Narses and Belisarius, has a special resonance for us older devotees of science fiction: in utterly different ways it inspired both Isaac Asimov's *Foundation and Empire* and Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* – say nothing of *Count Belisarius* itself, one of Robert Graves's finest novels. Kay has approached it in the special way he invented for *Lions*, creating numerous analogies between his invention and the historical facts and legends of the time. For instance, we know that the Goths who conquered Italy subscribed to the Arian heresy, which had to do with the precise nature of the Son of God; in Kay's world the Antae who have conquered Batiara are devotees of the Heladikan heresy, which has to do with the precise nature of the Son of God (a synthesis of Phaeton and Prometheus with a touch of Icarus). The effect is to anchor the imagination, but it would quickly become tedious if Kay were not both a master of suspense and exceptionally good at delineating character, especially female character.

Despite a strong resemblance its world is not the world of *Lions* (the maps are inconsistent), nor is it written in the same spirit; it has an underlying seriousness, but doesn't aspire to the tragic grandeur of the earlier book – yet, anyway; there's ample scope for tragedy in the second half, once all the principals are assembled in Sarantium itself, but so far it's best described as a top-quality romantic adventure.

Martinian of Varena, the most renowned mosaicist in the West, is summoned to Sarentium to work on a grandiose project for the Emperor Valerius II. Being unwilling to undertake the journey at his age he departs his erstwhile pupil (now partner), Crispin. Crispin endures some adventures (one with a mystical aspect) on the road and manages to rescue Kasia, a young girl who is about to be sacrificed to one of the indigenous chthonic gods. Arrived in Sarentium, he finds himself embroiled by virtue of his summons



Back to Byzantium

Chris Gilmore

in at least four ongoing intrigues, and survives two attempts on his life which have to do with another matter altogether – well, it's that sort of city.

As before, Kay has gone to considerable effort with his background, especially in depicting the craft of the mosaicist and the skills of the racing charioteer, and he uses both to bring out the character of his principal in a superb setpiece scene where Crispin, who has only ever seen a single day's chariot-racing, correctly works out, by a combination of logic and observation, how an especially complex race was won – something which none of the many aficionados assembled has been able to do. It's a great scene, but it points out the book's one serious weakness: Kay has overloaded Crispin. He is described as passionate about his art, and about the wife and daughters (dead in the plague) whom he mourns, and about the pathos and horror of Kasia's position; he is also described as a man who takes a schoolboy's delight in trading obscene threats and insults with any who irk him, to such an extent that he very nearly gets himself and his party killed at one point. Not an impossible combination, yet he is able to impress the emperor and his court with his repartee no less than his analytical powers. A little too much to ring true, and it's notable that as the book progresses the schoolboy aspect rapidly wanes. I suspect it to be entirely absent from the sequel, wherein Crispin seems set to find himself torn between the mutually exclusive demands of five strong-minded and beautiful women. I anticipate it with vicarious gusto.

And talking of women... As a feminist icon, Lizzie Borden (b. 1860) has almost too much going for her. Her skinflint father, having denied her an education which would have allowed her to make her own way, also denied her a settlement, which would have rendered her independent or at least highly marriageable. Instead he kept her at home, in effect as a servant for himself and his second wife with whom she did not get on, and whom she suspected of plotting to displace her in her father's will. The prospect before her was that on his death she would find herself middle-aged, homeless, destitute and unemployable save in the most menial capacity. In the circumstances, it's hard to blame her for murdering father and step-mother with an axe in 1892.

On the other hand... There was only ever circumstantial evidence to connect her with the double murder, and a diligent search failed to uncover a shred of forensic to substantiate the charge. In particular, the circumstances were such that the murderer must have been liberally spattered with blood, and the timing was such that Lizzie could never have disposed of the bloody clothes. (A theory which only surfaced many years later was that Lizzie stripped off, committed both murders in the nude, sponged herself clean and got dressed again. Etchison makes no reference to it, which is a pity as it would have made a great cover – in the best possible taste, of course.) Nevertheless, she was peremptorily remanded in custody, brought to trial and, though acquitted, made the subject of a cruel folk-rhyme. She inherited her rightful share of the estate, but lived a social outcast and died, most likely a virgin, in 1927.

You perceive the dilemma. For maximum impact, Miss Borden needs to be guilty and innocent at the same time, and therein lies her fascination, specifically for Lee and Jenny Marlow, the principals of Dennis Etchison's *Double Edge* (Pumpkin, £6.99 & £15.99), who are preparing a TV programme about her. This being a work of horror fiction, it is not altogether surprising that unpleasant events (principally but not exclusively axe-murders) begin to gather round the couple, paralleling the development in Jenny's mind of a theory that allows Lizzie to be (of course) both innocent and guilty for maximum impact.

Well and good, but for the horror to work there needs to be a sense of something more coherent than one dam' thing after another. *Pace* the blurb, there's no sense either of a quasi-supernatural presence or of dis-

parate elements being artistically woven together, because there's no sense of Lizzie having ever existed except as an interesting legend from which the Marrows hope (blamelessly enough) to make a little money by means of a new approach. The ultimate effect is more that of a traditional murder mystery than a horror story, which is all very well in its way but not what the cover promises.

And approaching yet another small-press item from the outside, Bruce Durie's *The High History of the Holy Quail* (Citron, £5.99, B-format) is advertised as the first of a trilogy, the latter parts being entitled *The King of Elfland's Daft* and *The National Elf*. I quailed, and there's truly no better word. Gritting my teeth I read the first sentence. "It was a dark and stormy Knight. In fact, it was an eight-foot tall dark and stormy Knight." I'm no lover of *Peanuts*; was I now faced with 230 close-typed pages of Schultzian archness?

Well no, not exactly. Durie is one of those humorists whose motto is "Dif'rent folks, dif'rent jokes," from which it would seem to follow that if you stuff your pages with jokes in a complete spectrum of sorts, strengths and ages, you're bound to please everyone some of the time. Aho! Who am I to disagree? I was actually pleased enough of the time to vindicate his theory, little though I support it myself. I could have done without almost all the puns, many of which depend for their effect purely on the recognition that a pun has been made. For instance, late in the book we encounter an immensely powerful pair of demiurges, who stand in relationship to Durie's universe much as Koschei, who made things as they are, stands to that of James Branch Cabell. Just as Koschei was a bureaucratic dullard, they are an ageing working-class couple of bland benevolence straight out of Raymond Briggs. Their names, however, are Rhon and Aeth, which evokes *Take It From Here* rather than Briggs, so that one has to make a certain imaginative leap: one must picture the married life of Ron and Eth Glum. Yet the entire point of Ron and Eth, which lent their comedy its underlying pathos, was that they would never get married; they would remain, in Eth's phrase, "young engaged set" until they died from natural causes. The effect is to tell me that Durie is a man of my own generation, as one would need to be to get the reference at all, but suggests that he has insufficient respect for the material.

Even worse is his decision to call

one of his characters, a man who speaks like a thesaurus, Psyclips KNib. Cycle clips have their semantic associations, of course, but there is nothing inherently funny about them (though there's a very good joke about them in *Brass*), and they have nothing whatever to do with either his character or Roget, but there they are, to be laughed at in a self-congratulatory way by those weak-minded enough to be proud to have got it – the same who will see nothing objectionable when Durie uses "the fact that" twice in two lines.

Aho! It's not all that bad by a long shot. The idea of an analogue to the World Wide Web being operated by giant spiders is clever and new, and the force of "extropy" underlying Durie's universe, which counterbalances entropy and allows his "magick" to work is intelligently deployed even though it isn't new. Yet even there, why not magic? Magick was Aleister Crowley's perverse spelling for his own special and (allegedly) superior brand, but there's no hint of Crowley here – perhaps because Durie doesn't get the reference, but who can say?

The story itself takes off of the standard S&S quest for the bird of the title (which is no more inherently ridiculous than the Maltese Falcon), complete with gnomic prophecies, skirmishes and new personnel picked up on the way. It holds together well enough to allow for some genuine suspense among all the puns, and I genuinely warmed to Slouch, the leading character, to whom the quest is also his first and only Big Chance. Manumitted from his previous avocation of catamite-in-training because a prophecy demands that he be a sorcerer's apprentice, for him the quest represents not only the certainty of danger and the prospect of riches, but entrée to a respectable profession and a gateway to the realm of heterosexual love. Will it be requited? Read it and see, before passing it to someone of a more suitable age – 13 to 15, I would guess; boyish humour is always crude, but boyish instincts are sometimes sound.

And by a pleasing coincidence, having opened with a book by G. G. Kay, I now turn to one that recalls him strongly, though Patricia A. McKillip's *Song for the Basilisk* (Ace, \$22.95) is more like *Tigana* than *Lions* or *Sarantium*.

The Basilisk of the title is Arioso, Prince of Pellior House, a cruel tyrant who has come to dominate the city of Berylon, which had once lain under the sway of four great houses. Having

won his war with the dominant House Tourmalyne he has, by way of cowering the other two, extirpated it with the savagery traditional to such occasions, leaving only a few poor relations out in the sticks – or so he thinks; as is no less traditional, there's a hidden heir, preserved by magical intervention and now, at last, thirsting for revenge. Caladrius hadn't always thirsted thus; he had grown up on a distant island where he had trained as a bard (of the musical sort), a profession which he finds preferable to his dangerous and uncomfortable destiny in Berylon – so much so that by the time events force him to go there he is pushing 40 and has sired Hollis, an heir of his own.

Cut to Berylon, where Arioso has three grown-up children: Tuar, a nonentity; Damiet, a clothes-obsessed bimbo; and Luna, who has so much of his character and capabilities that she is suspected by many of being no natural birth but some sort of construct. Rightly or wrongly? Read and see!

Also in Berylon there are those, including a number of musicians, who have no connections with the defeated Tourmalynes, but still chafe under Arioso's rule. They are plotting revolution, very ineffectively, but unlikely to be excused for incompetence. The musical connection sucks in both Caladrius and Hollis, and the plot advances surely to notable a climax, counterpointed with a sub-plot that reinforces the pervasive sense of music as a wellspring of power.

Arioso has commanded a new romantic opera for his birthday, and Damiet (despite an entire lack of talent) has pre-empted the role of prima donna. Everyone gets dragged into this grotesque enterprise no less than the planned uprising, which is also (of course) planned for Arioso's birthday. Moreover, the evolving plot of the opera comes to mirror with uncomfortable precision the events leading to the uprising, adding a dash of hysteria to what is already a highly wrought plot.

Such a combination would collapse in many hands, but McKillip is equal to the numerous challenges which she sets herself. In particular, the conjuration scenes are as good as any I've met, and over all I've only two quibbles. Arioso's character and motivation are insufficiently explored; there are hints that he's something more than a mere megalomaniac, but we never find out what. And in a book so saturated with music in all its aspects, she should have found other surnames for the three characters called Dulcet, Tabor and Brio.

Chris Gilmore

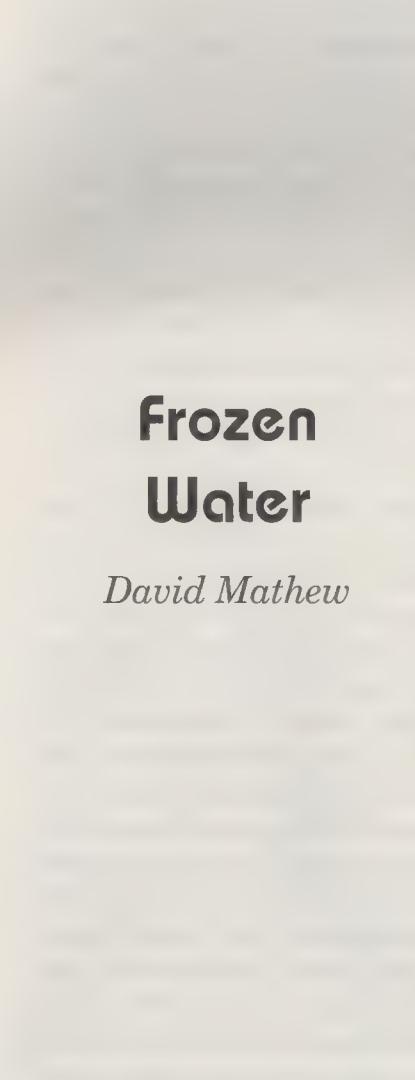


Short stories appear in publications, and are frozen in time; they are placed in the cerebral deep-freeze. The reader commits the taste that the tale has left (good or bad) to memory, and associates it with a particular context, a mood, or a piece of personal history. Years later, a collection is planned by the author, and some of these dishes are defrosted. In theory, the story will be as the reader remembers it; but sometimes the reader wonders why the author wished to defrost *that* one.

It's a tribute to the quality of Ramsey Campbell's prose, and to his rate of production, that one scarcely feels like posing such a question. With *Ghosts and Grisly Things* (Pumpkin Books, £6.99) Campbell returns with one of the worst titles and best volumes of his career. Hot on the heels of a novel (*The Last Voice They Hear*) and a spoken-word cassette (*Twilight Tales from Merseyside*), this is a dip into both the recent and distant past – these stories being an alternative assessment of the author's most recent 25 years.

Highlights include the first tale, "The Same in Any Language," in which a young boy, unhappily on holiday with his father and a woman who has become his father's girlfriend, is taken to the place "where the lepers used to live." What Campbell does well is racial bigotry; and the boy's father is a loud-mouthed racist of the first order. How could anyone be truly sorry for his unusual comeuppance, as shocking as it is? In "Going Under" a man on a charity walk through a tunnel meets resistance: some people hate him for his use of his mobile phone, and for his habit of stopping walking. Mob mentality is rife, and the ending catches in the reader's throat. What often works in Campbell's fiction is both the fact that the ending has not been seen coming, and the fact that there is often no rational explanation for the violent finale. The world has tipped off balance.

"Through the Walls" contains some disturbing fleeting notions on the subject of sexual attraction to little girls: more specifically, the family man in the tale scares himself with such thoughts, and others. In "This Time" an artist deals with various problems (the creative muse, a talk show) while little realizing that a work in progress will become the greatest of all. There is one brand-new story called "Ra*e," which is fine; but in the interests of balance, the following should also be noted: "The Alternative" is a story that doesn't work, and the experimental "A Street Was Chosen" (written in the passive



At all times, Byatt's prose is cool (despite the fact that this volume is subtitled "Stories of Fire and Ice": there are plenty of chips of ice still in these treats) and the tone is always controlled.

"A Lamia in the Cévennes" is a gem. A painter struggling with his art is forced to have the water in his sun-drenched swimming pool changed. Because he insists on this replacement occurring immediately, the water must be dragged from an unusual source; and present in the delivery is a snake, which talks to the artist. If he will kiss her, she will take on her human form and love him. The problem is, he would rather paint her than kiss her (apart from anything else she has a mouth "full of small, even, pearly human teeth... (and) a flickering dark forked tongue, entirely serpentine.") But this snake wants *someone* to kiss, and what will she be like once she has found her mate? Both an examination of the creative process and a funny love story, this is also both subtle and fierce at the same time.

"Bagladys" is a strange story: it is read, shrugged over, left behind like bones on a plate; and only later does its charm and sweet poison start working. It's like an episode of *The Twilight Zone* – but one of the Rod Serling ones, not the Richard Matheson's. A little thin, perhaps, on first consumption, but with the ability to coagulate. A rich woman in a shopping precinct becomes detached from reality and ends up being perceived as someone other than a rich woman: "she discovers that the Good Fortune Mall extends maybe as far into the earth as into the sky, excavated identical caverns of shop-fronts, jade, gold, silver, silk, lacquer, watches, suiting, bonsai trees and masks and puppets..."

"Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" has an artist wanting to paint the unattractive cook. (There are several examinations of the nature of beauty in *Elementals*.) In so doing, a new relationship between the cook, the artist and another woman is forged. This is a story about what the eponymous painting is showing; but also about how the painting was made. It rings with Biblical bells. As does the rites-of-passage story, "Jael," which describes a childhood of Scripture, academic competition, and schoolgangs that were not as dangerous as they thought they were at the time. When Byatt's narrator says "It's so long ago, we shall be judged without being imagined," she is referring to the fact that they would use the word "nigger" without trying to be

Frozen Water

David Mathew

voice) is quirky, but not to this reviewer's taste. Only two stories, really, can be so pointed out. The rest are first class, and recommended; if anything, time in a cold place has made some of these tales stronger, timeless. To be reheated in another quarter of a century.

It was a pleasant surprise to receive I. A. S. Byatt's *Elementals* (Chatto & Windus, £12.99). Byatt, after all, is a Big Author – and consequently does not need to worry about the opinion of a (hold your nose) "genre magazine." But it would seem that a certain wind is changing; and on this wind is borne the message that all sales are good sales. After all, *Elementals* is a collection of fantasy stories – and it's an excellent one too – albeit fantasy under layers of other flavours. There's a good deal of social satire, some samples from the *Arabian Nights* stories, some comedy, a story based on a poem by Keats, some transformed morsels from the Bible...

offensive; but this sentence has such an elegiac quality to it, that Byatt might well have been sweeping into her description the entire childhood itself.

There are two more stories, one of them, "Crocodile Tears," weighing in at nearly 80 pages. This collection, too, is recommended; it scratches an itch on the brain that the reader is unaware he was even experiencing.

Isn't it true that some titles seem thawed-out too, as though the reader put them away earlier, and forgot doing so? What else can account for the fact that Chaz Brenchley's rhythmic title, *Tower of the King's Daughter* (Orbit, £6.99), seems familiar? It beats throughout, especially once it is revealed that the king had no daughter.

This is Book One of a four-volume series entitled "Outremer," but it feels finished. In an atmosphere of intrigue and deception, two plots jostle for pride of place. One concerns Marron, a young man learning theology in a strict religious environment, who becomes involved with a man of war: he fetches and carries for this man. A conflict of interests is imminent; and Marron must fight between his loyalty to his squire and his loyalty to his God. Along his road to self-discovery he will become adept at combat (but will acquire a significant wound that will help steer him into the mouth of his destiny); and he will become not so adept at handling wine, even needing to be woken to say his prayers because he gets drunk. He will be forced to shovel human waste (coprophiliacs will take portions of this book to their hearts). But most importantly of all he will meet a young woman named Julianne. Despite their different statuses in life, they will respect one another.

Plot two. Julianne is on her way to her wedding in Elessi. She is a headstrong, occasionally foolish leading lady. Early on in the journey the travelling party meets a *djinni*, whom Julianne – unwisely – asks a question. Her mysterious female friend, Elisande, is furious about this: "It knew your name," she said carefully, 'because it was waiting for you. Perhaps for me, for us both; but certainly for you.'" Why? the reader asks throughout, while also wondering what the king's daughter might really be. But as it says in the book: "Some answers... were designed to bury the question, not to resolve it."

Tower of the King's Daughter is Brenchley's first fantasy novel. He has taken well to the form, or vice versa; it is rich and warming as Irish stew.

One way of discerning quite how rich... sorry, successful... an author has become might be to gauge how large the name appears on the cover. The words *Clive* and *Barker* stand tall and proud on *Galilee* (HarperCollins, £17.99). For over a decade now, reviewers have been speculating that Barker would and should be going off the boil... soon. But in this reviewer's opinion, Barker has scarcely put a foot wrong in his professional career. Of course, *Imajica* was more or less unfinishable; but most of his work has been enjoyed – and *Galilee* is no exception. Billed prematurely as "Classic Clive Barker," this is the story of an old man who is asked to write the family's history...

This narrator, Edmund, is of the Barbarossa clan, and is the son of a noted lothario and (ahem) "cockmeister." Edmund's stepsister and stepmother (on whom he has a crush) want him to write the story – which has roots in the American War of Independence. (Thomas Jefferson built the family home for the aforementioned stepmother, who has magical powers and is obviously ageing well.) The past and the present are intertwined, with plenty of up-to-date asides. Edmund, who begins the novel in a wheelchair, becomes imprisoned by the tale, and is very protective of it: when his stepsister criticizes ("You write long sentences... It's a bit gossipy") and asks if it's wise to go so far back, Edmund insists, "It's all context."

Indeed it is. But the more interesting parts involve the modern day, and the other mighty family – the Gearys. By the time that Rachel, a shop assistant, has married Mitchell Geary (a man of whom it is said: "The less substance there was to what he was saying, the more at ease he seemed"), a subplot, of revenge and loathing, is being administered the kiss of life. Rachel loses their baby, but the marriage, before long, is failing anyway. Rachel leaves, goes back to be comforted by her mother (these conversations are good, which is more than can be said for the tiresome squalls that constitute conversations between the Geary brothers).

With her boozy soak of a sister-in-law, Margie, Rachel goes to a place that is reserved for Geary women. Meeting Galilee, a Barbarossa who has been travelling the seas for decades, is the turning point in Rachel's life. There's a cockle-warming courtship, but despite the fact that Galilee has inherited his father's rascally romantic ways – a girl, or boy, in every port – he is rather violent towards Rachel dur-

ing their lovemaking. Meanwhile, Margie is murdered... by her own husband? Secrets, it becomes clear, are being held in an old journal; and Rachel wants to know what's going on, while her estranged husband wants revenge on the Barbarossa who has taken his wife away. When Rachel finally meets the magical mother of the Barbarossa family (if "meet" is the right word to describe an argument in which one of the participants is not even physically present), sparks fly. Galilee is summoned home...

At the heart of Barker's novels is the notion of the redemptive powers of love. Subtitled "A Romance," *Galilee* is no exception; but on preparing to read the big tome – with knees bent and back straight – one has no idea that the following 600 pages will be a Mills & Boon story injected with miracles. At the end, even Edmund is bemused by the fact. It's a nice love story, of course, and (let's be fair) there is the sort of violence and porn for which Barker has become famed: but most of that seems less important than the boy-meets-girl plot-hook.

David Mathew

Clarion

The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop

The 32nd Annual Workshop

June 13 - July 24, 1999

Writers-in-Residence:

Karen Joy Fowler

James Morrow

Tim Powers

Mike Resnick

Michaela Roessner

Judith Tarr

Editor-in-Residence:

Scott Edelman

Deadline for Receipt of Application:

April 1, 1999

For more information contact with SASE
Clarion 1999 c/o Mary Sheridan
E-185 Holmes Hall
Lyman Briggs School
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48825-1107

BOOKS RECEIVED



NOVEMBER 1998

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. **The Twinkling of an Eye, or My Life as an Englishman**. Little Brown, ISBN 0-316-64706-3, 484pp, hardcover, £20. (Autobiography of a leading sf writer; first edition; published at the age of 73, this is Aldiss's first true autobiography, as opposed to his more anecdotal "literary autobiography" of some years ago, *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's* [1990]; a good read: touching, colourful and as lively as ever.) 18th November 1998.

Anthony, Mark. **Beyond the Pale: Book One of The Last Rune**. Earthlight, 0-684-85167-9, 527pp, C-format paperback, cover by Steve Youll, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; a debut book by a new American writer.) 2nd November 1998.

Applegate, K. A. **The Forgotten**. "Animorphs, 11." Scholastic/Hippo, 0-590-11256-2, 156pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 20th November 1998.

Baker, Kage. **In the Garden of Iden**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-73179-7, 294pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; involving time-travel to 16th-century England, this is a debut novel by a new, but not particularly young, American woman writer [born 1952] who has an artistic/acting background and "has taught Elizabethan English

as a second language" [huh? – as the characters say in Heinlein novels]; we believe there has been a British edition of this, probably from Hodder/NEL, which was not sent to us for review; it seems to have garnered good responses in the States.) November 1998.

Barnes, John. **Finity**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86118-4, 303pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it seems to be a parallel-worlds thriller.) March 1999.

Bear, Greg. **The Forge of God**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60265-1, 474pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 23.) 26th November 1998.

Bell, John. **The Far North and Beyond: An Index to Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy in English-Language Genre Magazines and Other Selected Periodicals of the Pulp Era, 1896-1955**. "Occasional Papers Series, 61." Dalhousie University [School of Library and Information Studies, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 3J5, Canada], ISBN 0-7703-9774-3, v+62pp, very large-format paperback, \$28.95. (Sf/fantasy bibliography, first edition; it's arranged alphabetically by author, and then thoroughly indexed by story title and by magazine title; there are also indices by artist and by series title, a checklist of Canadian pulp magazines, and a secondary bibliography; a specialist item, but fascinating for those of us who are interested in the old pulps – several of yesteryear's "mega-pulps" whom people tend to think of as American, such as the amazingly prolific H. Bedford-Jones and, of course, A. E. van Vogt, were Canadian-born.) Late entry: August publication, received in November 1998.

Benford, Gregory. **Against Infinity**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79058-0, 243pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1983 [not "1993" as the copyright statement seems to indicate]; this is the one which is a rewrite, in outer-space terms, of William Faulkner's hunting novella "The Bear.") November 1998.

Bertin, Joanne. **The Last Dragonlord**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86429-9, 398pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by yet another new, young American writer who is being given the Big Commercial Fantasy push – Anne McCaffrey, Joan D. Vinge and "Robin Hobb" [Megan Lindholm] all commend it on the back cover.) December 1998.

Bertin, Joanne. **The Last Dragonlord**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-684-85168-7, 398pp, C-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) December 1998.

Bova, Ben. **Moonwar**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78698-2, 501pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1997; the British [Hodder & Stoughton/New English Library] edition was sub-titled "Book II of the Moonbase Saga," but this one isn't.) November 1998.

Bowes, Richard. **Minions of the Moon**. Tor, no ISBN shown, 320pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it appears to be a fix-up of previously-published short stories; despite the title, this is not pulp space opera like W. G. Beyer's *Minions of the Moon* [serialized in *Argosy*, 1939; in book form 1950], but some kind of subtle dark fantasy: Neil Gaiman compares it to works by Stephen King and Jonathan Carroll – "spooky, strange and unsettling"; Budrys, De Lint, Pollack, Rusch, Windling and others all commend it too; Richard Bowes [born 1944], author of *Feral Cell* [1987], etc, should not be confused with Richard Bowker [born 1950], author of *Dover Beach* [1987], etc – although both are American and started publishing around the same time.) February 1999.

Bradbury, Ray. **Ahmed and the Oblivion Machines: A Fable**. Illustrated by Chris Lane. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97704-4, unpaginated [circa 60pp], hardcover, cover by Lane, \$14. (Juvenile fantasy short story, first edition; a slender but attractive piece of Arabian Nights-type kids' fantasy for the Christmas market, it's dedicated to the artist Chris Lane, "whose imaginative sketches for Tokyo Movie Shinsa's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* caused this book to be born.") December 1998.

Brust, Steven. **Dragon**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86692-5, 288pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Hickman, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a new "Vlad Taltos" novel, and the first we have seen in quite a few years: in the meantime, it seems there have been a couple of others that we were not sent – Athyra and Orca.) November 1998.

Calder, Richard. **Frenzetta**. "A novel of the future." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-683-1, 268pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel first edition; Richard Calder, a writer of dense and rather demanding sf, which broadly speaking is in Cyberpunk mode, begins to seem almost prolific – this one comes fairly hard on the heels of his previous novel, *Cythera* [1998], although it does not appear to be connected; the opening section, "Lost in Cathay," recently appeared as a novella in the U.S. anthology *Leviathan 2* edited by Jeff VanderMeer and Rose Secrest [Ministry of Whimsy Press].) 17th December 1998.

Chadbourn, Mark. **Scissorman**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60224-4, 352pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Farren, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1997.) 19th November 1998.

Clark, Simon. **The Fall**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-69610-9, 537pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £17.99. (Horror novel, first edition; it involves time-slippage to the past.) 3rd December 1998.

Clark, Simon. **Vampyrhric**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-69609-5, 441pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1998; Yorkshire vampire stuff.) 17th December 1998.

Cooper, Louise. **If You Go Down to the Woods**. "Creatures, 2." Hippo, 0-590-11163-9,



152pp, B-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 20th November 1998.

Cooper, Louise. **Once I Caught a Fish Alive**. "Creatures, 1." Hippo, 0-590-11162-0, 142pp, B-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 20th November 1998.

Cooper, Louise. **See How They Run**. "Creatures, 3." Hippo 0-590-54381-4, 148pp, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 20th November 1998.

Curry, Patrick. **Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity**. Harper-Collins, ISBN 0-261-10371-7, 206pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Critical "defence" of the great fantasy writer, first published in 1997; this, which we hadn't heard tell of in its first [Floris Books] edition, is an interesting little polemic written from a Green perspective; Tolkien, it claims, is the great prophet of our time, and his books, far from being anti-progressive or reactionary, are inspirational of a sort of revolutionary, anti-Modernist ecologism ["Modern" as used here is a cuss-word applied to the whole complex of rampant big capitalism, corrupt communism, and overweening science and technology]; *The Lord of the Rings*, Curry seems to assert, is not only the century's biggest-selling work of fiction [about 50 million copies worldwide, according to him, which beats the Guinness Book of Records totals for Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* (28.5 million) and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (27 million) by a considerable margin] but it is also the century's great holy book; if Curry is right, then this may become remembered as "the Age of Tolkien" in the way that we now think of the late 16th century as "the Age of Shakespeare"; the author is a Canadian living in Britain.) 7th December 1998.

Day, Peter, ed. **The Search for Extraterrestrial Life: Essays on Science and Technology**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-850414-4, xi+167pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Popular science anthology, first edition; illustrated with drawings, graphs and photographs, this is a selection of the most recent talks by eminent scientists to be delivered under the aegis of the Royal Institution, London – a series which has been running since 1826; the title piece is by Sir Arnold Wolfendale, and there are other essays on the planet Venus, the science of meteorites, nanotechnology and various other topics; there is a five-page appendix, on unnumbered pages, describing the Institution's history and work: it seems to have started out, at the time of the Industrial Revolution, as a sort of poor man's Royal Society, allowing the relatively humble to participate in science.) No date shown: received in November 1998.

Donnelly, Marcos. **Prophets for the End of Time**. Baen, ISBN 0-671-57775-1, 367pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Hickman, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; it may be a debut novel, but we're told nothing about the author; this is the American first edition of November 1998 with a British price sticker added; it's distributed in the UK by Simon & Schuster.) November [?].

Gaiman, Neil. **Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97364-2, xii+340pp, hardcover, cover by J. K. Potter, \$24. (Fantasy collection, first edition; it contains 30 stories and poems which together probably represent all of Gaiman's short fiction to date that has been published outside the comics medium; about a dozen of these mostly slim and graceful pieces appeared previously in his small-press collection *Angels & Visitations* [DreamHaven, 1993].) November 1998.

Goonan, Kathleen Ann. **Queen City Jazz**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648317-8, 465pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; Goonan's highly-praised first novel, appearing in Britain four years late; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 91.) 7th December 1998.

Gray, Julia. **Ice Mage**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-689-0, 535pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; we mistook this for a book by Julian May at first glance, and, who knows, maybe that was the publisher's intention; however, "Julia Gray," we are told in an accompanying letter, is "the pseudonym of an author whose previous novels have sold over 300,000 copies"; she seems to be British.) 17th December 1998.

Green, Simon R. **Deathstalker Prelude**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60330-5, 542pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Mennim, £6.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in the USA as *Twilight of Empire*, 1997; the three constituent novels, *Mistworld*, *Ghostworld* and *Hellworld*, were first published in the USA, 1992-93; together they form an overture to the author's later space-opera series about the adventures of the hero Owen Deathstalker, which began with the novel *Deathstalker* [1995]; English writer Green is a speedy and confident latter-day pulpster for the US paperback-original market; his opening lines tend to go like this: "The starship *Devastation* dropped out of hyperspace and moved into orbit around Wolf IV. The planet's surface was hidden from view by the swirling atmosphere. It looked very much like any other planet, a drop of spit against the darkness.") 27th November 1998.

Haggard, H. Rider. **When the World Shook**. Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-07-6, xvi+272pp, B-format paperback, cover by Whiley Dunsmore, £4.99. (Fantastic romance, first published in 1919; this, perhaps Haggard's nearest approach to an sf novel, has an Atlantis-like central idea, concerning the discovery of survivors from an ancient civilization in suspended animation below a Pacific island; it's subtitled "Being an Account of the Great Adventure of Bastin, Bickley and Arbuthnot," and there's a good deal of agonized reference to World War I, which was raging at the time Haggard wrote; to the best of our knowledge this is the first British paperback edition; David Pringle's review article "Was Rider Haggard a Pulpster?" [from *Interzone* 135] is reprinted yet again as an "introductory essay" – although it contains no reference to

this particular novel.) No date shown: received in November 1998.

Hobb, Robin. **The Mad Ship: The Liveship Traders, Book II**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225479-4, x+673pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1999; proof copy received; the second in a new series about living ships, unrelated to the author's previous "Farseer" trilogy; "Robin Hobb" is a pseudonym for Megan Lindholm.) 1st March 1999.

Holdstock, Robert. **Gate of Ivory**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648002-0, 348pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *Gate of Ivory*, *Gate of Horn*, 1997; a new "Ryhope Wood" novel, follow-up to *Mythago Wood* [1984], *Lavondys* [1988], *The Bone Forest* [1991] and *The Hollowing* [1993]; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 135.) 7th December 1998.

Holland, Tom. **Deliver Us from Evil**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-1861-1, 582pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 127.) 19th November 1998.

Holland, Tom. **The Sleeper in the Sands**. Little Brown, ISBN 0-316-64480-3, 372pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Historical horror novel, first edition; this clever young author's fourth novel [or fifth, if one counts an earlier Ancient Rome novel called *Attis* (1995) which no one seems to have seen], following *The Vampyre*, *Sleeping with Panthers* and *Deliver Us from Evil*, is praised by Julian Rathbone as "a wonderful book... a glorious yarn combining the Curse of the Pharaohs, with Indiana Jones, a good measure of the Arabian Nights, a touch of Rider Haggard"; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 139.) 19th November 1998.

Jeapes, Ben. **His Majesty's Starship**. Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-439-01133-7, 347pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; a debut novel, in space-operatic mode, by a British writer whose short stories have appeared in *Interzone* and elsewhere; although a kids' book, it looks to be very meaty.) December [?].

Jones, Diana Wynne. **The Dark Lord of Derkholm**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06676-8, 328pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Campion, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 27th November 1998.

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Deep Secret**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60223-6, 383pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Mennim, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 126.) 27th November 1998.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume Nine**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-554-X, xi+494pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories [all from the year 1997] by John Burke, Pat Cadigan, Ramsey Campbell, Simon Clark, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Brian Hodge, David Langford, Stephen Laws, Thomas Ligotti, Yvonne Navarro, Kim



Newman, David J. Schow, Douglas E. Winter and others; two stories, "Save As..." by Michael Marshall Smith and "Grazing the Long Acre" by Gwyneth Jones, are from *Interzone*; there is also, as usual, a sadly lengthy [and appropriately ghoulish] "Necrology," giving details of writers, film-makers, actors, etc, who have died in the past year; an effective selection, recommended.) 26th November 1998.

Kilpatrick, Nancy. **Children of the Night: Power of the Blood, Volume I.** Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-14-3, 276pp, trade paperback, cover by Jay Hurst, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1996; the previous edition was from Raven [Robinson Books's short-lived horror imprint], and appears to have been the world first; the author [born 1946] is Canadian, and she is being touted as "one of the leading writers of vampire fiction.") November 1998.

Kilpatrick, Nancy. **Near Death: Power of the Blood, Volume II.** Pumpkin Books, ISBN 1-901914-17-8, 281pp, trade paperback, cover by Jay Hurst, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; although it was published first, this is the second in the trilogy: it has not appeared previously in Britain.) November 1998.

Kilpatrick, Nancy. **Reborn: Power of the Blood, Volume III.** Pumpkin Books, ISBN 1-901914-20-8, 280pp, trade paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £6.99. (Horror novel, first edition; David Marshall's new small press Pumpkin Books appears to have rescued this trilogy from publishing limbo after many of the larger houses in both the USA and the UK seemed to lose faith in horror series.) November 1998.

Lawhead, Stephen. **The Dragon King Saga: In the Hall of the Dragon King, The Warlords of Nin, The Sword and the Flame.** Lion, ISBN 0-7459-4032-3, 1017pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nik Spender, £9.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition [?]; the three novels were first published separately in the USA, 1982, 1984 and 1984.) 20th November 1998.

Laws, Stephen. **Chasm.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-66612-9, 546pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Blake, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1998; concerning the tribulations of a town, most of which disappears into a huge crevasse; Laws's tenth novel: his publishers are now touting him as the "crown prince of British horror.") 17th December 1998.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Nimisha's Ship.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04321-9, 328pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, £16.99. (SF novel, first edition [?]; an old-fashioned-looking space opera, partly set on a planet called Erewhon, it's described as "a stand-alone novel.") 10th December 1998.

Martin, George R. R. **A Clash of Kings: Book Two of A Song of Ice and Fire.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224585-X, 741pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; another blockbuster.) 16th November 1998.

Mason, Kelvin. **The Advent of the Incredulous Stigmata Man.** Citron Press [Suite 155,

Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 0QH], ISBN 0-7544-0013-1, 220pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (SF/horror [?] novel, first edition; this is another of the products of a recently set-up self-publishing collective, "New Authors Co-Operative"; the note on the author tells us that he "has written five novels and a collection of stories" – however, it's not stated whether any of those earlier works were published.) 14th December 1998.

Matthews, Andrew. **Darker.** "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, 0-590-11339-9, 152pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition; it's Welsh-flavoured, so the author is presumably British.) 20th November 1998.

Meyrink, Gustav. **The Angel of the West Window.** Translated by Mike Mitchell. "Dedalus European Classics." Dedalus, ISBN 0-946626-65-0, 421pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Smith, £9.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in Germany, 1927; this was the first English translation, originally issued by Dedalus in 1991; it concerns Dr John Dee, the Elizabethan magus; Gustav Meyrink [1868-1932] was an Austrian best remembered as the author of *The Golem* [1915].) 7th January 1999.

Murphy, David. **Alienations: Stories of the Near Future.** "Writer of the Future." Piper's Ash Limited [Chippenham, Wilts. SN15 4BV], ISBN 1-902628-26-8, 64pp, small-press paperback, £2.95. (SF/fantasy collection, first edition; six stories by an Irish writer who has already published a good deal in the small press; copies are available directly from the author at £3.50 postage inclusive, care of Albedo One, 2 Post Rd., Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland.) 1st November 1998.

Niven, Larry. **Rainbow Mars.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86777-8, 316pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (SF/fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; the title story [circa 200 pages] is a new short novel set on Mars and involving time travel; the five older time-travel stories also included here are "The Flight of the Horse" [1969], "Leviathan!" [1970], "Bird in the Hand" [1970], "There's a Wolf in My Time Machine" [1971] and "Death in a Cage" [1973]; in a four-page afterword Niven makes it clear that he still regards time-travel stories as fantasy.) March 1999.

Piziks, Steven. **In the Company of Mind.** Baen, ISBN 0-671-57776-X, 339pp, A-format paperback, cover by Charles Keegan, £5.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1998; it may be a debut novel, but we're told nothing about the author; this is the American first edition of November 1998 with a British price sticker added; it's distributed in the UK by Simon & Schuster.) November [?] 1998.

Price, Susan. **The Sterkarm Handshake.** Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-590-54301-6, 370pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Edwards, £14.99. (Juvenile SF novel, first edition; Susan Price [born 1955] is a British children's writer of some distinction [winner of the 1987 Carnegie Medal for *The Ghost Drum*]; this new book concerns time travel between a polluted 21st century and the

16th-century border country of England and Scotland.) December [?] 1998.

Rosenberg, Joel. **Not Exactly the Three Musketeers.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85782-9, 316pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; set in the author's "best-selling Guardians of the Flame universe," it's the kind of thing which inevitably is described as "rollicking.") February 1999.

Sheckley, Robert. **Godshome.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86804-9, 251pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; by a veteran SF writer whose last several novels have been detective stories, it's described as "fast-paced, witty fantasy in the *Unknown Worlds* tradition of L. Sprague de Camp, L. Ron Hubbard, and Robert A. Heinlein.") January 1999.

Somtow, S. P. **Darker Angels.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60060-8, 351pp, A-format paperback, cover by Max Schindler, £5.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in the UK, 1997; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 128.) 19th November 1998.

Stables, Gordon. **Kidnapped by Cannibals.** "A ripping yarn." Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NV], ISBN 1-902058-06-2, xv+287pp, B-format paperback, cover by Tania Lomas, £4.99. (Juvenile adventure novel, first published in 1899; this has no fantasy content, but is included here for the sake of completeness; it begins as a Scottish "kailyard" [i.e. cabbage-patch] novel, and ends up among cannibals in the South Seas; there is a new introductory essay by yours truly [David Pringle] which does not discuss the novel in hand but deals in general terms with Dr Gordon Stables [1840-1910] and the magazine for which he wrote, *The Boy's Own Paper*; unfortunately, the introduction is marred by misprints, mainly in the punctuation and paragraphing; it also seems a pity the publishers couldn't have chosen one of Stables's boys' SF novels for reprinting – *The Cruise of the Crystal Boat* [1894], perhaps, or *The City at the Pole* [1906] – rather than this comparatively mundane item.) No date shown: received in November 1998.

Stoddard, James. **The High House.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-02208-3, 321pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1998; apparently a debut novel, it contains an "Author's Note" which states that it is "a tribute to Lin Carter and the Sign of the Unicorn fantasy series that he edited from 1969 to 1974"; it begins with a quotation from George MacDonald's *Lilith*, and seems to be dense with references to other fantasy classics.) December 1998.

Tuttle, Lisa, ed. **Crossing the Border: Tales of Erotic Ambiguity.** Indigo, ISBN 0-575-40117-6, 382pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Erotic fantasy/horror/mainstream anthology, first edition; it contains a mix of new and reprint stories by Michael Blumlein, Poppy Z. Brite, Angela Carter, Carol Emshwiller, Neil Gaiman, Graham Joyce, A. L. Kennedy, Joyce Carol Oates, Ruth Rendell, Nicholas Royle, Geoff Ryman, Cecilia Tan, Lucy Taylor, Sue Thomas, Fay Weldon and others.) 26th November 1998.



Verne, Jules. A Journey to the Centre of the Earth. Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-08-9, viii+224pp, B-format paperback, cover by Colin Scott-Brett, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in France, 1864; this is a reprint of a [presumably out-of-copyright] "English version prepared by Isabel C. Fortey"; alas, it appears to be abridged: there are only 224 large-print pages here, whereas the proficient Robert Baldick translation for Penguin Books [1965] contains 254 pages of smaller print; there is a four-page introduction about Verne, adapted [with punctuation and dating errors – sigh] from the entry in the first edition of Peter Nicholls's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* [1979]; it's one of Verne's finest novels, a classic which everyone should read sooner or later, but you're probably best advised to stick with the Penguin edition; there is also a fairly recent Oxford University Press World's Classics edition, translated by William Butcher, which we haven't seen but which is said to be painstakingly accurate.) No date shown: received in November 1998.

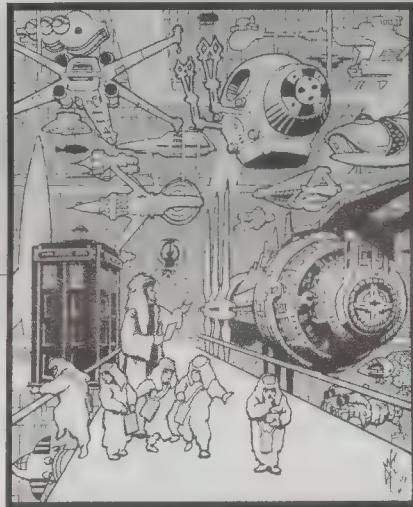
Vira, Soma. Double Lives: Angel Trails, Book One. Space Link Books [77 West 55th St., New York, NY 10019, USA], ISBN 0-892158-01-9, xv+292pp, A-format paperback, cover by Duncan Long, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the author was born in Lucknow, India, in 1932, but now lives in America; possibly this book, which seems to be pitched at the "New Age" mystical market, appeared in India earlier than its US copyright date would suggest; presumably the cover artist, Duncan Long, who is quoted in praise of Soma Vira's work on the front, is the same Duncan Long [born 1949] who wrote an sf novel called *Anti-Grav Unlimited* [1988].) No date shown: received in November 1998.

Wilson, Gahan. The Cleft and Other Odd Tales. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86574-0, 333pp, hardcover, cover by the author, \$23.95. (Horror-fantasy-humorous collection, first edition; Wilson is best known as a cartoonist [for *The New Yorker*, *Paris Match* and many other top periodicals], and this book is illustrated throughout, as one might expect, with his zany drawings; but he has also been an occasional short-story writer for decades, contributing mainly to slick magazines such as *Playboy* and *Omni*; now 20-odd of his tales are collected here, the earliest dating from 1962, and the most recent, "The Cleft," apparently original to the volume.) 13th November 1998.

Wilson, Martin. The Homunculus. Christoffel Press [44 Elm Rd., Wisbech, Cambs. PE13 2TB], ISBN 0-9527723-3-7, 169pp, small-press paperback, £5.99. (Gothic fantasy novel, first edition; a tastefully-produced little paperback, it's the author's second novel and is billed as the sequel to *The Castle of Oblivion* – which Chris Gilmore reviewed favourably in *Interzone* 130.) 1st November 1998.

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.



Carey, Diane. Call to Arms...: The Dominion War, Book Two. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-02497-3, 267pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the American first edition with a British price added; it's based on seven series episodes, scripted by Ira Steven Behr, Bradley Thompson, Ronald D. Moore, Rene Echevarria and others; as with the other three volumes in this "Dominion War" sub-series [see below, under Carey and Vornholz], the book's individual title is not actually given anywhere on its cover, only on its title page.) November 1998.

Carey, Diane. Sacrifice of Angels...: The Dominion War, Book Four. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-02498-1, 269pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the American first edition with a British price added; a direct follow-on from the Diane Carey title listed above, it's based on the same seven series episodes, scripted by Ira Steven Behr and others; the two novels by John Vornholz listed below are original spinoffs which intertwine and give additional "back-story"; complicated? – you bet, but that's the way spinoffery is headed these days.) December 1998.

Feist, Raymond E. Krondor, the Betrayal: Book One of the Riftwar Legacy. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97715-X, 376pp, hardcover, cover by Liz Kenyon, \$24. (Fantasy computer-game novelization, first edition; there is an author's afterword which explains the book's provenance, and a note on the title page which states: "Based on the story

Betrayal at Krondor by Neal Halford, John Cutter, and Raymond E. Feist"; it comes with a "Free CD-ROM game and demo inside!") November 1998.

Galland, Richard Wolfrik. The World of Warhammer: An Official Illustrated Guide to the Fantasy World. Carlton Books, ISBN 1-85868-488-9, 192pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Copiously-illustrated guide to the fantasy role-playing game-world invented by Games Workshop Ltd; first edition; the cover artist, and the drawers and painters of the many internal illustrations [mostly in full colour] do not appear to be credited anywhere.) 2nd November 1998.

Kinnard, Roy. Science Fiction Serials: A Critical Filmography of the 31 Hard SF Cliffhangers; with an Appendix of the 37 Serials with Slight SF Content. McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-0545-7, 217pp, hardcover, \$39.95. (Illustrated guide to U.S. cinematic sf "chapter-plays" of the sound period [1930-1955]; first edition; a useful critical guide, alphabetically arranged by title, to a largely-forgotten [though still available, on video-cassette] sub-type of media sf, it covers such enjoyable old items as *Flash Gordon* [1936], *Buck Rogers* [1939] and *Brick Bradford* [1947]; since these were mostly shoot-'em-ups intended for a juvenile audience, the use of the term "hard sf" in the book's title is ill-advised; interestingly, much of this material was not originated by the film-makers but began as newspaper comic-strips and/or radio serials.) December 1998.

Levene, Rebecca, and Simon Winstone. Where Angels Fear. "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20530-8, 241pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £5.99. (Shared-universe sf novel; first edition; as usual, it features the galactic adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who], created by Paul Cornell; this is a first novel for both authors, who have worked as editors on the Virgin Books series.) 17th December 1998.



Vornholz, John. Behind Enemy Lines: The Dominion War, Book One. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-02499-X, 269pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) November 1998.

Vornholz, John. Tunnel Through the Stars: The Dominion War, Book Three. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-02500-7, 269pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1998; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) December 1998.

SMALL ADS



ALBEDO ONE: Ireland's leading SF magazine. #15: Walter Jon Williams interviewed. Fiction by Hugh Cook, Teng, Stableford, etc. Reviews and comment. £25 for best story. £3.50 for one (£10 for four): *Albedo One*, 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

FOR SALE: SF, FANTASY, HORROR, MYSTERIES, etc. Paperbacks, magazines, pulps, hardcovers, comics. Thousands. Free search service. Send want lists. No obligation. Also buying. John Schneider, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, WI 54130-3233, USA.

SUBMISSIONS REQUIRED (fiction and otherwise) for new magazine. Send A5 SAE for sample and guidelines. *Rubbawall Designz*, 6 Curzon St., Albert Avenue, Hull HU3 6PH.

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: I will pay first-edition prices, or more, for the following Dobson reprint editions. *Far Stars* (2nd, about 1964 in d/w), *Men, Martians and Machines* (2nd, 1963 in d/w), *The Great Explosion* (2nd, 1963, and 3rd, 1966, both in near-fine/fine d/w). These books urgently needed to complete a set. Ring (0118) 986-9071, or write to: John Ingham, 41 Rosemary Avenue, Lower Earley, Reading, Berkshire RG6 5YQ.

CARICATURE of you or friend/loved one in SF/F/Other costume. Full colour, any size. You send photo, suggest costume and setting. Ideal Christmas/Birthday present. Ring or write: Michael Stewart, Sleetmoor House, Sleetmoor Lane, Swanwick, Alfreton, Derbyshire DE55 1RH (01773 603126).

HUGO AWARD-winning *Science Fiction Chronicle*, published since 1979, has all the news of US and UK publishing, plus reviews, interviews, forthcoming books, much, much more. Sample copy £3.50, subscription 12/£29 airmail from Algol Press, c/o R. Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, E. Ham, London E6 1AB.

SF, HORROR, FANTASY paperback firsts/collectibles US & UK. Specialists in Howard, Burroughs, Dick, Brunner, Moorcock, Lovecraft, Doc Savage, Shadow, Pulp Heroes, but all pre-1980 authors represented. Send 50p SAE or \$2 cash for catalogues: Zardoz Books, 20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4D.

CHRIS GILMORE doesn't just review... Have you a manuscript that needs just that little extra polish to be published? I offer honest opinions and expert attention at reasonable rates. Ring (01234-346142) or write: 27 Salisbury St., Bedford MK41 7RE.

AN ORIGINAL OIL PAINTING from photograph, slide or print. Of your favourite sci-fi character, scene, dragon or anything you like. Any subject undertaken. For details, please send SAE to Dunn's Fine Art Originals, Dept. A2, 44 Reeve St., Lowestoft NR32 1UF.

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: All non-English editions of Russell's books urgently required. Write to: John Ingham, 41 Rosemary Avenue, Lower Earley, Reading, Berkshire RG6 5YQ, England.

BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around – so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

SMALL ADS in *Interzone* reach 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, together with payment, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues (VAT is inclusive).

FANTASTIC LITERATURE. Large, regular catalogues of quality science fiction, fantasy and horror for sale. Free lists: write now to Fantastic Literature, 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY.

NOESIS SF MAGAZINE – first issue now available! Fiction, fact, reviews, prize crossword etc. Annual (four-issue) subscription £10.50, single issue £2.75, available from Noesis, 61 Pengarth Rise, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2RR. Cheques payable to "Noesis." Work from new, and established authors, illustrators and cartoonists welcomed. Visit our website – <http://www.ndirect.co.uk/~rwadding/Noesis/index.html>

SF ENCYCLOPEDIA CD-ROM. If you have this Grolier CD-ROM, David Langford's new viewer software can provide added speed, ease of use and extra searching power. Windows 95/98/NT only. £11.75 (or \$17.50) inclusive from 94 London Rd., Reading, RG1 5AU (e-mail enquiries: ansible@cix.co.uk. More information: <http://www.ansible.demon.co.uk/sfview/>).



COMING NEXT MONTH

An *Interzone* favourite, Eric Brown, returns with one of his major stories to date, "Hunting the Slarque." There will also be good new fiction by other talented writers – well-known and not-so-well-known – as well as all our usual features and reviews. So watch out for the March 1999 issue, number 141, on sale in February.

'Explodes in your face like a fistful of fireworks' PAUL J. MCAULEY

'Convincing and terrifying' Locus

'Dark, edgy and inflicted with just the right degree of lyricism' WILLIAM GIBSON

RICHARD CALDER

Frenzetta

A NOVEL OF
THE FUTURE

AVAILABLE NOW FROM ORBIT

<http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk>



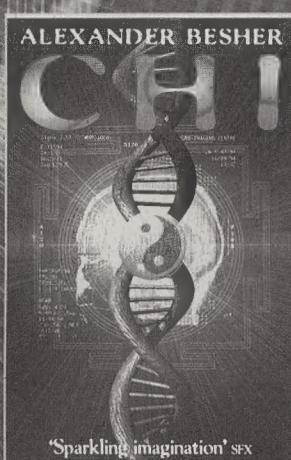
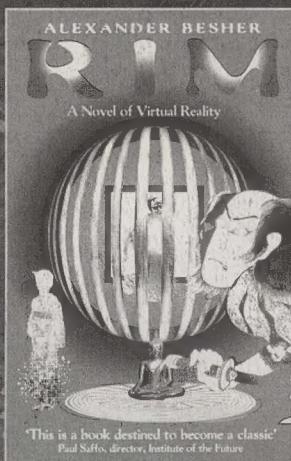
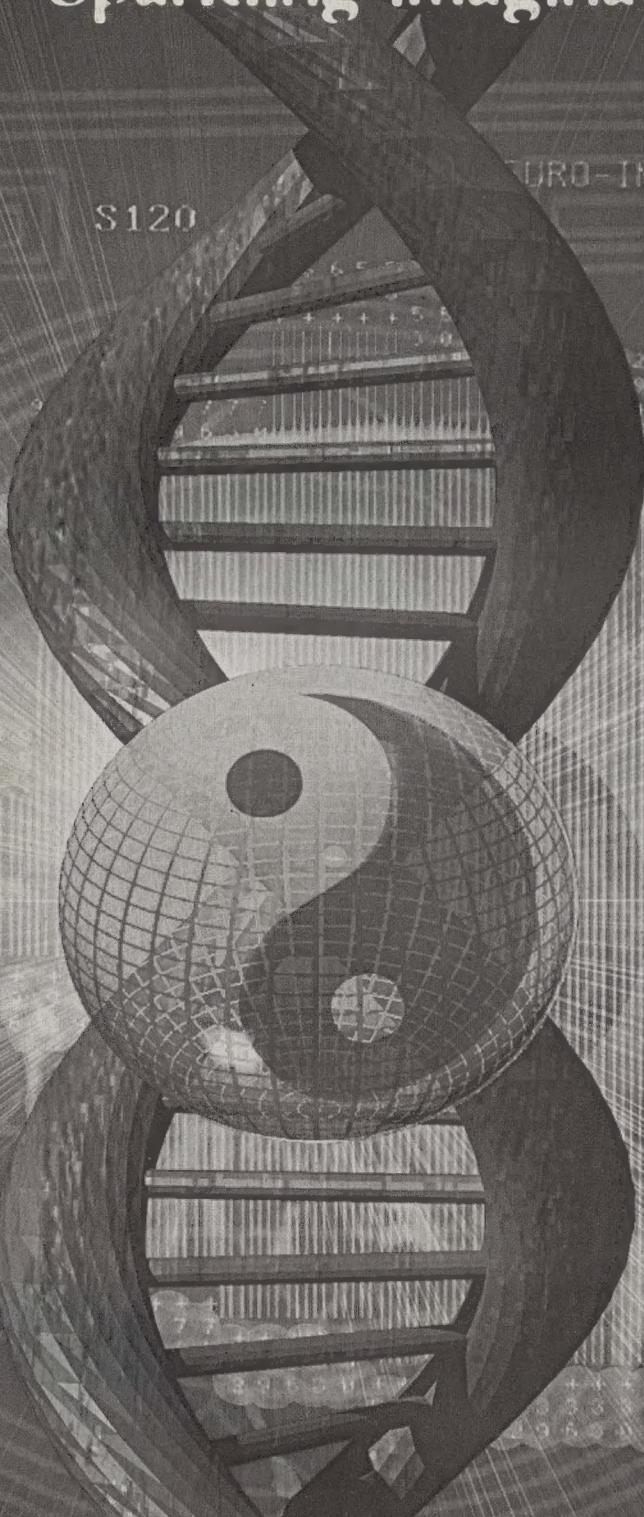
ALEXANDER BESHER

'Sparkling imagination' SFX

SYS#MRC1000

S120

EURO-IMAG



ALL AVAILABLE FROM



<http://www.orbitbooks.co.uk>

**THIS SCAN IS
COURTSEY OF THE
LENNY SILVER
COLLECTION**